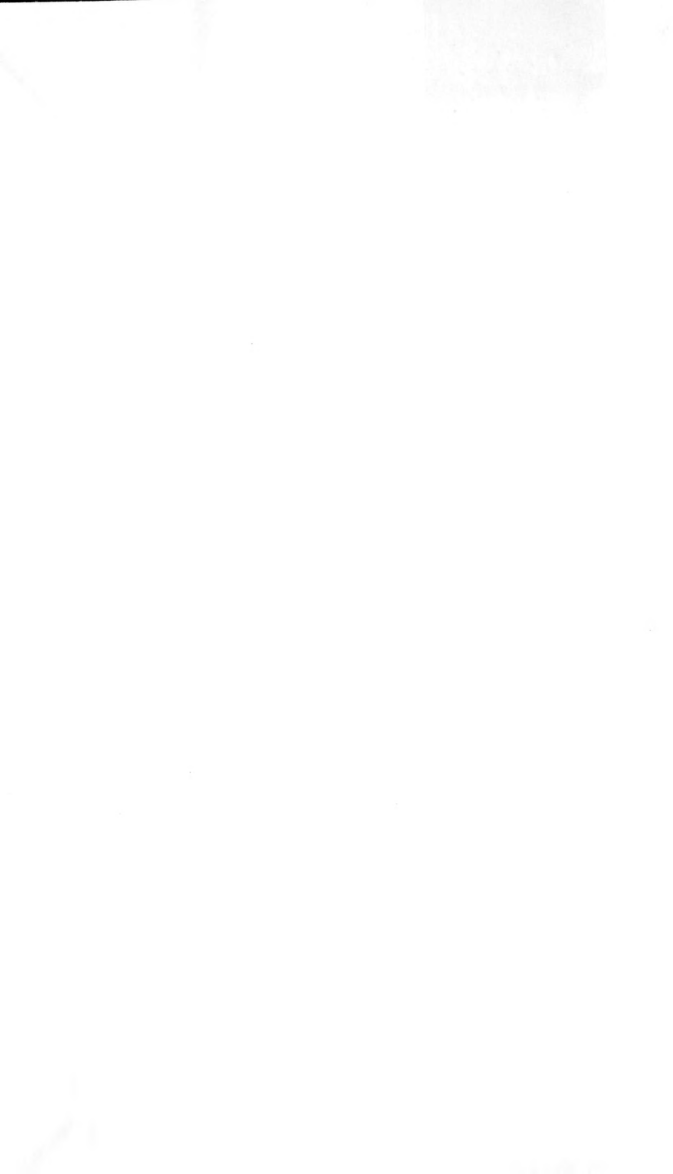


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John Milton

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THE

LIFE OF JOHN MILTON.

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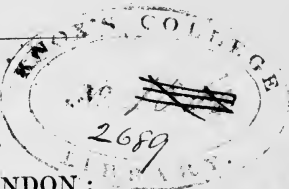
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SIR EGERTON BRYDGES, BART.

Is not each great, each amiable Muse  
Of classic ages in our MILTON met?  
A genius universal as his theme;  
Astonishing as Chaos; as the bloom  
Of blowing Eden fair; as Heaven sublime!

THOMSON.

170 1833



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## PREFACE.

I AM desirous to say a few words on the arduous task I have undertaken. I am called upon to show that the subject I have chosen required a new attempt to put it in its true light. The lives already given to the public of the immortal author of 'Paradise Lost' are numerous. It may seem ungracious to speak of my predecessors, if not with unqualified praise; yet it is necessary.

The foundation of all the Memoirs of the Poet is that which was written by his nephew Edward Philips: his personal knowledge of the bard gives authenticity to all he relates; but it is a piece of biography brief and bare. How much more interesting it would have been, had it been written in the amiable and sentimental, though half-gossiping style of old Isaac Walton!

Toland took up the subject, and collected much useful matter; but he was a heavy writer, who never enjoyed much favour with the public. The

Life by Fenton the poet is too meagre to satisfy a moderate curiosity.

Dr. Birch was a laborious searcher into minute facts among original documents ; but had neither the power of reflection, criticism, nor style.

Bishop Newton was a classical scholar, of excellent taste and judgment ; but was, for the most part, languid and feeble.

Peck was a mere antiquary ; toilsome, but tasteless, frivolous, weak, and absurd.

We now come to one who has been thought the giant of biography—Dr. Samuel Johnson. He was undoubtedly a man of admirable talents ; of great sagacity ; of powers of criticism subtle, strong, and original ; of acute knowledge of human nature ; of nice observation ; of great experience, both in manners and in literature ; and of a virtuous, conscientious, and religious mind : but he had his foibles, his blind prejudices, and his perverse and excessive humours. In politics he was a bigot ; in sensibility and poetical taste he was hard, and one “ who could not, or would not hear.” His ‘ Life of Milton,’ by some strange chance, yet keeps its hold at least on a part of the public ; but as it is flagrantly dero-



gatory to the unrivalled bard's fame, both as a poet and as a man, it has appeared to me not only a pleasure, but a duty, to endeavour to counteract its poison. Many will deem the attempt bold and presumptuous: I care not; my arrow is shot, and I will endure the consequence with calmness and fortitude.

But it will be objected to me that this duty has been already performed by others. Let me enter into a little explanation on that subject.

Johnson has generally the reputation of strong, pure, and elegant language. In his 'Life of Milton' he is sometimes vulgar and coarse. His manner is dogmatical and pedantic; but the matter of his criticisms is worse than his style. He affects to be humorous or witty, where he is often only pompous and malicious. The observation made by Coleridge in his 'Table-Talk,' on the style of his 'Rambler,' is often true here.\* Johnson abounded in verbiage,—even in his latter writings. There are those, who still believe that in soundness of criticism he is almost infallible; and that they, who defend the higher flights of

\* See 'Quarterly Review,' Feb. 1835.

imagination, have airy notions, the effects of whim and false pretension;—that Milton may be ingenious and fantastic,—but that solid sense is with Johnson. When common intellects have the authority of a man of Johnson's literary reputation for this sort of ordinary matter-of-fact taste, they nurse themselves in it with a triumphant scorn of their opponents. But what can rich and accomplished minds say of him, who could find no true poetry in *Lycidas*?

Johnson's political hatred to Milton was neither rational nor moral. Milton might carry his love of democracy much too far: I, for one, assuredly think so.—His defence of the people for their decapitation of Charles I. brings no justification to my mind. But to doubt that he acted on conscientious principles, is to have no faith in human protestations or human virtue. If Milton was a bigoted democrat, Johnson was a most bigoted and blind royalist. There is not a particle of benevolence or candour in this furious and bitter piece of biography of the celebrated critic; nor is there any research; nor is the narrative well put together. There are not even many splendid passages, which commonly occur in other

Lives by this popular author, except what are borrowed from Addison's criticism on the great Epic Poem.

Immediately after Johnson's death, Thomas War-ton published his edition of the 'Juvenile Poems.' In the preface and notes he scattered many antidotes to Johnson's poison, which restored the minds of the lovers of true poetry to their proper tone: but it had not much effect with the multitude, who resolved to nurse the tasteless dogmas which seemed to justify their own insensibility. The Wartons were men of the romantic school of poetry, which had gone out of fashion from the introduction of the French school at the restoration of Charles II. The days of chivalry were gone; and the picturesque requires a nicety of eye and brightness of fancy, which are not the endowments of the many.

The lovers of political liberty, rational as well as irrational, were alarmed at the Tory critic's extravagant attacks on their favourite doctrines. Dr. Charles Symmons stepped forward with a new life of the poet; but it was coarsely and heavily, though violently, written; and it did not obtain much reception except among readers of a

political cast. It was not as a politician that Milton was ever a great favourite in the literary world.

Hayley, himself a poet, now also came forth in defence of the great bard with enthusiasm, taste, and a copiousness of polite and rich erudition; but what he possessed in love and admiration he wanted in power. His genius was not strong; his style was diffuse and languid; and his constant use of superlative epithets of a vague and trite character gave a sickly cast to his biography, which failed to make much impression. Cowper's translations of the Latin poems, with his notes, had something more of charm; but he could not hit Milton's style; and the notes are neither numerous nor profound.

Todd has performed all he undertook to perform: the toil of his researches has been indefatigable; and the notices he has recovered from the State-Paper Office are curious: but his business is that of a literary antiquary, and his narrative and his notes can scarcely be expected to afford much interest to the general reader. The supposed coincidences with the thoughts or expressions of obscure and forgotten poets are only

attractive to poring and minute bibliographers; and rather incumber and obscure than illustrate the great poet.

The 'Life and Notes,' by the Rev. John Mitford, added to the 'Aldine edition,' are certainly of a higher tone. Of a living contemporary it will not be expected that I should say more.

Assuming this point of literary history to be fairly stated, and these criticisms to be well-founded, I have been induced, still perhaps with some rashness, to enter the lists. In going over ground so often trod, I will not deny that I have often had great difficulty to avoid triteness; for I have always resolved not to seek for novelty at the expense of truth. It is easy to find novelty if we permit ourselves to turn aside into the paths of error. To be natural and just, yet not obvious, is, as Addison says, the grand secret.

I have followed the steps of no preceding biographer—I have recast the whole. I have expressed no sentiment which I did not feel: I have uttered no opinion but with sincerity. I hope that I have not been guilty of indulging in commonplace, clothed in a pompous profusion of empty words. If I have been severe on Johnson, it is

not a liberty so great as he has himself taken on the sublimest and noblest of our poets. I have given reasons for the judgments I have ventured to pronounce; and if the principles of poetry, which I have adopted,—not discovered,—are wrong, or my application of them not just, let it be shown by temperate criticism. I may be mistaken; but I have not ventured them without a deep and unimpassioned consideration of fifty years.

But whatever becomes of my part in this edition, the illustrations from the rich and incomparable pencil of Turner, will, I doubt not, secure the public favour to it. He has entered upon the work with the enthusiasm and fellow-feeling of a highly-endowed poetical mind, and in his daring flight has reached a level of imagination, which no rival, ancient or modern, has surpassed.—He is worthy to illustrate MILTON.

The notes will be chosen from the numerous preceding annotators, with all the care, and I hope, taste, which can be exercised on such a task. Every thing frivolous or minute will be rejected: the amusement or instruction of the general reader—well-educated, and of native

sensibility—will alone be regarded. It is the editor's opinion, that poetry ought to be addressed, not to the learned, but to those of inborn spirituality. Too much learning incumbers and overlays poetry; and a reference to abstruse or pedantic notes destroys its spell.

But to return to the Life. Of a great poet's history we desire to know more than the leading facts, and the titles and dates of his works: we wish to know his private disposition, feelings, temper, habits, and manners. Milton's contemporaries have preserved little on these topics concerning him; and we are left to deduce them from incidental passages in his prose works, or from the tone and colour of his poems. Less in this way has been attempted by my predecessors in this task than seemed to me to be requisite. Perhaps I have been more copious in my own reflections and conjectures than many will approve: but if there is a raciness in my narrative—a freshness of tints, yet not over-coloured—a picture not dry, and barren, and faint; but distinct and prominent, yet natural—then I shall not have worked in vain. The same facts, told in the same words, and in the same order, and accompanied

by the same comments, have had a tendency, in the successive lives which have been published of our bard, during a period of more than one hundred and thirty years, to fatigue and repel the public attention. If there be any thing new in the *Life* by Johnson, it is the novelty of bitterness, sarcasm, and bad taste. These give a strong flavour, but one neither healthy nor pleasurable. Whoever has been seduced into Johnson's opinions on Milton, has received a great and momentous injury;—whoever has been confirmed by them in his own, must have an unenviable debasement of heart.

There have been temporary idols of admiration from whom it has been well to withdraw unmerited worship, but who will dare to say that the worship of Milton has been unmerited? Or, if any one has thus dared, does he not deserve chastisement, or at least reproof? Let not, therefore, the blind or attached followers of Johnson rise up in arms against me for the part I have taken. I have done it conscientiously; nor will it be easy to persuade me that in this case I am in error. My spirits, during the progress of this composition, have been subdued and despondent:



my private calamities have been numerous and relentless. In this state of depression I have worked as I could,—perhaps feebly and unsatisfactorily,—but with a sincere and conscientious desire of the truth. From the dead of the night, while all was silent around me, I have worked till dawn; and when the broad round beam of the golden sun had lifted itself clearly above the Alps, I laid down my pen, and prepared to enjoy in the open air the refreshing breezes of the blue lake. From that time till midnight again closed over me, all was idleness; but not all repose: the hateful affairs of the world tormented my heart and fevered my spirit. The peace which my destiny would take from me, I have endeavoured to court by lofty and inspiring literature.

Geneva, May, 1835.



LIFE OF MILTON.



# LIFE OF MILTON.



## CHAPTER I.

THE POET'S BIRTH—CHARACTER OF THE TIMES—  
HIS EARLY EDUCATION AND PROPENSITIES.

THE nativity of JOHN MILTON was cast at an epoch when mighty events were brewing in the political institutions of England, and when poetry had been advanced to greater perfection than it has ever since reached, except by his own voice. Spenser had not been dead ten years, and Shakspeare was yet living. In these two all the inexhaustible abundance of poetical thought, imagery, and language was to be found, even if all other fountains had been shut.

It was a stirring time for all minds, in every department. The whole reign of Queen Elizabeth had been full of gallantry, adventure, and great-mindedness;—of all that captivates the imagination, and all that exercises and elevates the understanding: and it was as profound in learning as original and brilliant in native faculties of the intellect: but there was the leaven of an unholy

and factious spirit mixed with it. The Puritans had been working under-ground and above-ground with incessant industry, intrigue, and talent; nor were the Papists more quiet.

Amid these fermenting elements of discord, grown into a frightful strength under the government of the pusillanimous, indiscreet, and pedantic monarch, James I., was our great poet born on the 9th of December, 1608, in the parish of Allhallows, Bread Street, London; the son of John Milton, scrivener. His mother's name was Caston, derived, according to the best authority, from a Welsh family.\*

Milton's grandfather was under-ranger of the forest of Shotover, near Halton, in Oxfordshire, in which neighbourhood his family was ancient, but had lost their estates in the civil contests of the houses of York and Lancaster. This grandfather was a rigid Papist; and, having disinherited his son for embracing the Protestant faith, though he had educated him at Christ Church, Oxford, this disinherison drove him to the meaner profession of a scrivener.

His father was advanced to more than a middle age when the poet was born. He was eminent for his skill in music.

It is a curious question, how far accidental cir-

\* What becomes of the heralds, who always omit what they most ought to tell? Witness the details of pedigree of Spenser and Milton, both of gentilitial descent; and the chief of the former living at that time in great affluence and magnificence at Althorp, allied to all the highest nobility!

cumstances operated on the bent and colours of Milton's genius. Probably he was early educated in Puritan principles. His earliest tutor, Young, was a rigid and zealous Puritan; yet there are many traits in his early taste and early poems which make us hesitate as to his boyish attachment to this sect. His ruling love of poetry and classical erudition was not very congenial with it: his love of the theatre, and all feudal and chivalrous magnificence, was alien to it. There are, however, a few passages in his *Lycidas* concordant with it.

It does not seem to me that there are any traces of these Calvinistic prejudices at the time he visited Italy, unless his friendship to Charles Deodate be a sign of it; which I think, looking at the poetical addresses to him, it is not. The nature of Milton's lofty temper, which could not endure submission even to college-discipline, is the more probable cause.

As the resistance to monarchical authority grew daily bolder, more obstinate, and more bitter, the chance is that Milton heated his mind, and became more fixed in his native love of liberty and self-government. As he was a reader of the most abstruse books, he entangled himself in the webs of controversy.

When King James died, March 27th, 1625, Milton was yet a boy, aged sixteen. That monarch could impress upon the poet nothing but scorn and hatred: his tyranny provoked rebellion; his cowardice encouraged it: his odious and im-

becile pedantry was in itself a ground of aversion to a great mind: and these unlucky aids were added to a flame already strong enough to burst from its bondage. The character of the court was notoriously corrupt and profligate: the favourite Villiers was alone sufficient to rouse all great and good minds against it: the preceding favourite, Carr, had been still worse: there was not only a want of principle, but of talent in the administration. England had become the laughing-stock of foreign powers: the internal policy was full of vicious abuses: the gentry were discontented; their swords were rusting, and *parvenus* began to mount over their heads: the order of knighthood was cheapened and prostituted: the Church lost the veneration it had till now possessed; and sects, that had hitherto lurked in holes and corners, arose and displayed themselves openly.

The cruel and infamous sacrifice of the life of the heroic Sir Walter Raleigh had filled the nation with horror and disgust; and Bacon's mixture of glory and littleness had taken from high station half its respect and all its splendour. All the relics of the public men of Queen Elizabeth's lofty reign had gradually disappeared. Buckhurst, Cecil, Egerton, Coke, the great navigators and soldiers; the gallant courtiers of ancient nobility; and all the leading names of commoners, rich in domains as well as in blood,—who carried more respect and influence than most of the best of modern nobility. Percy, the



Earl of Northumberland, was immured a prisoner in the Tower: the head of the Howards had not recovered attainder and confiscation: the Veres, Cliffords, Nevils, Staffords, &c., were all impoverished: the Courtenays had lost all their honours: young Essex was oppressed, insulted, and spurned. The sharers of the spoils of church lands alone of the former century were rich.

This state of things encouraged those political opinions which Milton's tutor, Young, had probably instilled into him: but his acquaintance with the Countess of Derby at Harefield, and the Earl of Bridgewater, her son-in-law, must be supposed to have counteracted them for a time.

There can be little doubt that the poet's travels to Italy increased this counteraction. Milton left England in 1638, in his thirtieth year; was presented to Grotius, at Paris, by Lord Scudamore, the English ambassador; proceeded to Nice, embarked for Genoa, and thence through Leghorn and Pisa to Florence. Here he stayed two months: hence he passed through Sienna to Rome, where he stayed another two months. On quitting Rome he visited Naples: it was his purpose also to have visited Sicily and Athens; but the intelligence of the disturbances which had broken out in his own country made him think of home.

He passed back through Rome, where he again stayed two months; and then again to Florence, where also he stopped two months. He now visited Lucca; then went across the Apennines

by Bologna and Ferrara to Venice: here he sojourned for a month; and then travelled by Verona and Milan to Geneva. His way back lay through France; having been absent about fifteen months.

I have brought these facts together rather out of order, because I believe they were the preservatives of Milton's poetical genius against his *political* adoptions. I now go back to his earliest manhood. From school the poet was sent to Christ's College, Cambridge, in February, 1624, æt. 16, just before King James's death. Already, or about this time, he had commenced his poetical character, for he had paraphrased two of the Psalms, cxiv. and cxxxvi. In this latter are some fine stanzas, indicative of the character of his future genius; witness this speaking of the Creator:—

Who by his wisdom did create  
The painted heavens so full of state:  
Who did the solid earth ordain  
To rise above the watery main:  
Who by his all-commanding might  
Did fill the new-made world with light,  
And caused the golden-tressed sun  
All the day long his course to run;  
The horned moon to shine by night  
Amongst her spangled sisters bright.  
He with his thunder-clasping hand  
Smote the first-born of Egypt land;  
And, in despite of Pharaoh fell,  
He brought from thence his Israël.  
The ruddy waves he cleft in twain  
Of the Erythræan main:  
The floods stood still, like walls of glass,  
While the Hebrew bands did pass:

But full soon they did devour  
 The tawny king with all his power.  
 His chosen people he did bless  
 In the wasteful wilderness:  
 In bloody battle he brought down  
 Kings of prowess and renown:  
 He foil'd both Seon and his host,  
 That ruled the Amorrean coast;  
 And large-limb'd Og he did subdue,  
 With all his over-hardy crew;  
 And to his servant Israël  
 He gave their land, therein to dwell.

In 1625 also Milton wrote his poem 'On the Death of a Fair Infant dying of a cough,' said to be his niece, daughter of his sister Phillips. It has some fine stanzas, but a little quaint and far-fetched. Take these for instance:—

## V.

Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead,  
 Or that thy corse corrupts in earth's dark womb;  
 Or that thy beauties lie in wormy bed,  
 Hid from the world in a low-delved tomb.  
 Could heaven, for pity, thee so strictly doom?  
 Oh, no! for something in thy face did shine  
 Above mortality, that show'd thou wast divine.

## VI.

Resolve me, then, oh soul most purely bless'd!  
 (If so it be that thou these plaints dost hear,)  
 Tell me, bright spirit, where'er thou hoverest,  
 Whether above that high first-moving sphere,  
 Or in the Elysian fields, if such there were.  
 Oh, say me true, if thou wert mortal wight,  
 And why from us so quickly thou didst take thy flight?

Thomas Warton observes of this Ode, that "on the whole, from a boy of seventeen, it is an extraordinary effort of fancy, expression, and ver-

sification : even in the conceits, which are many, we perceive strong and peculiar marks of genius. I think Milton has here given a very remarkable specimen of his ability to succeed in the Spenserian stanza : he moves with great ease and address amidst the embarrassment of a frequent return of rhyme."

Several other poems of Milton, both English and Latin, were written at college : from all these extraordinary compositions it appears that the tone, richness, and character of Milton's genius were always the same from the age of fifteen ; and probably even much earlier : it was always mixed up with both classical and abstruse learning ; and with an infusion from the poetry of the Bible. His Latin verses had less of the wild, the sublime, and the visionary than his English, which of course arose from the difference of his models, and the different characters of the respective languages. The feudal institutions, the enthusiasm and splendour of chivalry, and the superstitions of the dark ages had introduced a new school of poetry in Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Sackville, Spenser, and Shakspeare, more suited to Milton's genius ; which yet he was deterred from introducing in compositions, where he endeavoured to rival the ancient classics. There is more of what would be by cold minds called sober thoughts, sentiments, and images in his Latin productions than in his vernacular ; but there certainly is not the same raciness, vigour, and picturesqueness.

His Epistles to his friend Charles Deodate are, indeed, very beautiful: they relate his studies, his amusements, his feelings, his ambitions; but these have more of amiable virtue in them than of imaginative richness.

From one of these poems it comes out that he was rusticated from his college: the cause has been speculated upon with various comments and conclusions, according to the tempers and political and personal prejudices of the censors; but I have no doubt that Mr. Mitford's opinion is the correct one. Milton, with a haughty spirit, and a consciousness of his own great genius and learning, would not submit to academical discipline. The line—

*Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo—*

obviously means nothing but a repugnance to the observation of those petty formalities and rules which irritate and insult great minds: it is absurd to construe it to have been corporal punishment.

He retired to his father's villa at Horton, near Colebrook, in Middlesex, glad to quit the dulness of the reedy Cam; and gave himself up entirely to the literature of his own taste in his exile—except during occasional visits to the capital to enjoy the theatres, and the conversation of his friends. His college was glad to have him back again, conscious of the honour he did them by his mighty gifts and acquirements of intellect. But at Horton he says of himself,

*Tempora nam licet hic placidis dare libera Musis,*

*Et totum rapiunt me, mea vita, libri.*

*Excipit hinc fessum sinuosi pompa theatri,*

*Et vocat ad plausus garrula scena suos.*

Warton says, "Milton's Latin poems may be justly considered as legitimate classical compositions, and are never disgraced with such language and such imagery as Cowley's. Cowley's Latinity, dictated by an irregular and unrestrained imagination, presents a mode of diction, half Latin and half English. It is not so much that Cowley wanted a knowledge of the Latin style, but that he suffered that knowledge to be perverted and corrupted by false and extravagant thoughts. (Milton was a more perfect scholar than Cowley, and his mind was more deeply tinctured with the excellences of ancient literature: he was a more just thinker, and therefore a more just writer: in a word, he had more taste, and more poetry, and consequently more propriety.) If a fondness for the Italian writers has sometimes infected his English poetry with false ornaments, his Latin verses, both in diction and sentiment, are at least free from gross depravations.

"Some of Milton's Latin poems were written in his first year at Cambridge, when he was only seventeen: they must be allowed to be very correct and manly performances for a youth of that age; and, considered in that view, they discover an extraordinary copiousness and command of ancient fable and history. I cannot but add that Gray resembles Milton in many instances: among others, in their youth they were both strongly attached to the cultivation of Latin poetry."

Such was Milton's boyhood and youth; so predominant was his genius from the first. It was at Horton that Milton seems to have meditated

an Epic poem on King Arthur, or some other part of the old British story. See ‘*Epitaphium Damonis*’ (Deodatus), and ‘*Epistola ad Mansum*.’

In his ‘*Elegia in adventum Veris*,’ written in his twentieth year, the poet tells us that his poetical powers revived with the spring.

Milton’s early love of the theatre has been already mentioned ; Warton also observes this, and refers to ‘*L’Allegro*,’ v. 131 : but in another place the critic remarks, that his warmest poetical predilections were at last totally obliterated by civil and religious enthusiasm. Milton’s writings afford a striking example of the strength and weakness of the same mind. Seduced by the gentle eloquence of fanaticism, he listened no more to the “wild and native wood-notes of Fancy’s child.” In his ‘*Iconoclastes*’ he censures King Charles for studying “one, whom we well know was the closet companion of his solitudes, William Shakspeare.”

Nothing could be farther than Milton was, in his own early poetry, from this sour puritanism. In his ‘*Ode at a Solemn Musick*,’ he addresses “the harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,” to “wed their divine sounds :”—

And to our high-raised phantasy present  
That undisturbed song of pure consent,  
Aye sung before the sapphire-colour’d throne  
To him that sits thereon,  
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee ;  
Where the bright Seraphim, in burning row,  
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow ;  
And the cherubick host, in thousand quires,  
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,

With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,  
Hymns devout and holy psalms  
Singing everlastingly, &c.

Here is an anticipation of the 'Paradise Lost.'

Again: in his 'Address to his Native Language,' at a vacation exercise in the college, anno ætatis 19, he says,—

But haste thee straight to do me once a pleasure,  
And from thy wardrobe bring thy choicest treasure;  
Not those new-fangled toys and trimming slight,  
Which takes our late fantasticks with delight;  
But cull those richest robes and gayest attire,  
Which deepest spirits and choicest wits desire.  
Yet I had rather, if I were to choose,  
Thy service in some graver subject use;  
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round  
Before thou clothe my fancy in fit sound;  
Such where the deep transported mind may soar  
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door  
Look in, and see each blissful deity,  
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,  
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings  
To the touch of golden wires, while Hebe brings  
Immortal nectar to her kingly sire: &c.

"Here," Warton again observes, "are strong indications of a young mind, anticipating the subject of the 'Paradise Lost,' if we substitute Christian for Pagan ideas. He was now deep in the Greek poets."

The style, the picturesqueness of language, the character of the imagery, which Milton adopted from the first, was peculiar to himself. I do not say that many of the words, and even images, might not be found scattered in preceding poets, as Spenser, Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Joshua Sylvester's *Du. Bartas*; but



they could not be found combined into an uniform and unbroken texture, nor with the same uniformity of elevated and spiritual thought. In almost all precedent poets they are patches. That Milton was minutely familiar with the poems of all his celebrated predecessors is sufficiently evident; but so far as he used them, he only used them as ingredient particles. Spenser is rich and picturesque, but Milton has a character distinct from him. Milton's texture is more massy: the gold is weightier: he has a haughtier solemnity.

## CHAPTER II.

## CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF MILTON'S COLLEGE POETRY.

THOUGH there were many things which had a tendency to make Milton in his boyhood and first youth discontented with the social institutions of his country, as they then displayed themselves in all their abuses; yet the relics of former greatness still remained in such preservation as to give full force to the imagination: the names, the feudal history, the trophies of former magnificence, were all fresh. Though king James was mean, pedantic, and corrupt, king Charles had a royal spirit, and a benevolent, accomplished mind: he loved literature and the arts, and had subtle, if not grand, abilities. At this time, therefore, Milton's love of monarchical and aristocratical splendor was contending with his puritanic education, and his personal hatred of arbitrary power: his rich imagination and his stern judgment were at variance: his early poems rarely, if ever, touch upon sectarianism: Spenser and Shakspeare, courts, castles, and theatres, did not agree with Calvinistic rigours and formalities.

Milton's enthusiasm was, as Warton observes, the enthusiasm of the poet, not of the puritan.

At this time he had more of description and less of abstract thought: that sublime elevation of axiomatic wisdom was not yet reached; but from his earliest years he appears to have been conversant and delighted with the tone and expressions of the Hebrew poetry: his grand and inimitable 'Hymn on the Nativity' proves this. In that hymn is every poetical perfection, mingled with a sort of prophetic solemnity, which fills us with a religious awe: the nervous harmony and climax of the lines are also admirable. It was written in 1629, when he was in his twenty-first year, probably as a college-exercise. Mark this stanza:—

No war, or battle's sound,  
Was heard the world around;  
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;  
The hooked chariot stood  
Unstain'd with human blood;  
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;  
And kings sat still with awful eye,  
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

Or these two stanzas:—

The oracles are dumb;  
No voice, or hideous hum,  
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving:  
Apollo from his shrine  
Can no more divine,  
With hollow shriek, the steep of Delphos leaving.  
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,  
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic cell.

The lonely mountains o'er,  
And the resounding shore,

A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament ;  
From haunted spring, and dale  
Edged with poplar pale,  
The parting genius is with sighing sent :  
With flower-inwoven tresses torn  
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

Dr. Joseph Warton observes here : “ attention is irresistibly awakened and engaged by the air of solemnity and enthusiasm that reigns in this stanza and some that follow. Such is the power of true poetry, that one is almost inclined to believe the superstition real.”

I cannot doubt that this hymn was the congenial prelude of that holy and inspired imagination which produced the ‘Paradise Lost,’ nearly forty years afterwards.

I am not aware that our young bard had any prototype in this sort of ode : the form, the matter, the imagery, the language, the rhythm, are all new. Milton seems himself in the state of wonder and awe of the shepherds, and of all those whom he describes as affected by this miracle. The trembling, the fervour, the blaze, is true inspiration. In this state, the poet, visited by heavenly appearances, must have forgot all worldly fear, and written at this early age solely after his own ideas. The manner in which he describes the dim superstitions of the false oracles is quite magical.

I mention these things here as illustrative of Milton’s life. We must consider him now, when he had scarcely reached manhood, as already a perfect poet : he had stamped his power ; and

was entitled to take his own course accordingly in future life. Good words and pleasing thoughts may easily be worked into harmonious verse; but this is not poetry. I know nothing in which the genuine spell of poetry more breaks out than in the hymn I have here been praising. To show this, I must cite one more stanza:—

And sullen Moloch, fled,  
Hath left in shadows dread  
His burning idol all of blackest hue:  
In vain with cymbals' ring  
They call the grisly king  
In dismal dance about the furnace blue:  
The brutal gods of Nile as fast,  
Isis, and Orus, and the dog Anubis, haste.

“These dreadful circumstances,” says Warton, “are here endued with life and action; they are put in motion before our eyes, and made subservient to a new purpose of the poet by the superinduction of a poetical fiction, to which they give occasion. Milton, like a true poet, in describing the Syrian superstitions, selects such as were most susceptible of poetical enlargement; and which, from the wildness of their ceremonies, were most interesting to the fancy.”

There are magical words of the same character in almost every stanza. There is not a finer line in the whole range of descriptive poetry than this:—

In dismal dance about the furnace blue.

Yet this ode Johnson passes over in silence. Milton was already in a state of mental fervour, in

which all the materials of poetry were spiritualised into a pure golden flame ascending in glory to the skies.

Read also the two following lines, where the poet speaks of the flight of Osiris:—

In vain with timbrell'd anthems dark  
The sable-stoléd sorcerers bear his worshipp'd ark.

We cannot reason upon the effect of such combinations of words,—the charm is indefinable. Into what a temperament of ærial power must the author have been worked! Well might this sublime priest of the Muses then exclaim,

Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri,  
Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo.

No notice has been handed down how this extraordinary performance was received: it seems yet to have produced no fame to him. When he retired to his father's house at Horton next year, he retired as one who had yet done nothing. His Latin poems want the solemnity, the sublimity, the enthusiasm, the wildness, the imaginativeness, of these English, in which the spirit of Dante and Spenser already began to show itself, moulded up with a character of his own. But Ovid was a poet of a more whimsical and undignified kind, of whom it was strange that he should have been fond, but whom his Latin verses almost everywhere show to have been a great favourite with him.

When we see to what holy subjects and holy imagery Milton's mind was already turned, there

is reason for some surprise that he should still have had it in contemplation to produce an epic poem on the inferior and comparatively puerile theme of King Arthur, which no imaginative invention could have invested with the same dignity; when even chivalry had not yet arrived at its historic grandeur, and when every thing must have had a fabulousness which shocked probability. This is the more extraordinary, because Milton, though intimately conversant with the old romances, was still more familiar with the spirit, the language, the sublimity of the Sacred Story. It is clear that he was not frightened by the difficulty of duly treating this awful subject, from the manner in which he touched upon it in his majestic hymn, where he showed himself a master of all its mysterious tones. Had he at this time taken subjects from the Bible for a series of odes and hymns, he might even have excelled himself.

He has been supposed not to have had a lyrical ear: nothing can be a greater mistake. The arrangement of his stanza, and the climax of his rhymes in this hymn, are perfect. To my perception there is no other lyrical stanza in our language so varied, so musical, and so grand. The Alexandrian close is like the swelling of the wind when the blast rises to its height.

The poet perhaps already grasped at too immense a circuit of human learning: he might be at this early age darkening his mind with the factitious subtleties of politics and theology, which

might overlay the sublime and inimitable fire of the Muse. It seems as if he pursued the most abstruse, dry, and puzzling tracks of study. It is indeed to be remarked, that in most of his poems there is an occasional over-fondness for allusion to these blind parts of learning. Life is not long enough for every thing; nor can the most ardent flame of the intellect entirely overcome an excessive superincumbence of dead matter.

Though Milton's Latin poetry has been remarked not generally to partake of the character of his English, it has some exceptions. Warton observes of his poem '*In Quintum Novembris*,'—a college exercise,—that "it contains a council, conspiracy, and expedition of Satan, which may be considered as an early and promising prolusion of the bard's genius to the '*Paradise Lost*.'"

In this poem the cave of Phonos (Murther) and Prodotes (Treason), with its inhabitants, are finely imagined, and in the style of Spenser.

"There is," says Warton, "great poetry and strength of imagination in supposing that Murther and Treason often fly as alarmed from the inmost recesses of their own horrid cavern, looking back, and thinking themselves pursued."

In his seventeenth year Milton wrote a poem, ('*In Obitum Præsulis Eliensis*,') on Dr. Nicholas Felton, bishop of Ely, who died 5th October, 1626. In the midst of his lamentations he supposes himself carried to heaven. Cowper shall give the general reader a taste of it; for as Warton, candid in his very admiration, observes, "this sort of



imagery, so much admired in Milton, appears to me to be much more practicable than many readers seem to suppose."

I bad adieu to bolts and bars,  
And soar'd with angels to the stars,  
Like him of old, to whom 'twas given  
To mount on fiery wheels to Heaven.  
Boötes' waggon, slow with cold,  
Appall'd me not ; nor to behold  
The sword that vast Orion draws,  
Or e'en the Scorpion's horrid claws, &c. &c.

The same elegant and classical commentator remarks, that "the poet's natural disposition, so conspicuous in the 'Paradise Lost,' and even in his prose works, for describing divine objects, such as the bliss of the saints, the splendour of Heaven, and the music of the angels, is perpetually breaking forth in some of the earliest of his juvenile poems, and here more particularly in displaying the glories of Heaven, which he locally represents, and clothes with the brightest material decorations: his fancy, to say nothing of the Apocalypse, was aided and enriched with descriptions in romances."

The next poem, '*Naturam non pati senium*,' a college exercise, is also praised by Warton. He says that it "is replete with fanciful and ingenious allusions. It has also a vigour of expression, a dignity of sentiment, and elevation of thought, rarely found in very young writers."

The poem consists of sixty-nine lines. The whole is beautiful. In answer to those who

assert the liability of nature to old age, the poet says,

At Pater Omnipotens, fundatis fortius astris,  
 Consuluit rerum summæ, certoque peregit  
 Pondere fatorum lances, atque ordine summo  
 Singula perpetuum jussit servare tenorem.  
 Volvitur hinc lapsu mundi rota prima diurno;  
 Raptat et ambitos sociâ vertigine cœlos.  
 Tardior haud solito Saturnus, et acer ut olim  
 Fulmineum rutilat cristatâ casside Mavors.  
 Floridus æternum Phœbus juvenile coruscat,  
 Nec fovet effœtas loca per declivia terras  
 Devexo temone Deus; sed, semper amicâ  
 Luce potens, eadem currit per signa rotarum.  
 Surgit odoratis pariter formosus ab Indis,  
 Æthereum pecus albenti qui cogit Olympo,  
 Mane vocans, et serus agens in pascua cœli;  
 Tempōris et gemino dispertit regna colore.

No! the Almighty Father surer laid  
 His deep foundations, and providing well  
 For the event of all, the scales of Fate  
 Suspended, in just equipoise, and bade  
 His universal works, from age to age,  
 One tenour hold, perpetual undisturb'd.

Hence the prime mover wheels itself about  
 Continual, day by day, and with it bears  
 In social measure swift the heavens around.  
 Not tardier now is Saturn than of old,  
 Nor radiant less the burning casque of Mars.  
 Phœbus, his vigour unimpair'd, still shows  
 The effulgence of his youth, nor needs the god  
 A downward course, that he may warm the vales;  
 But ever rich in influence, runs his road,  
 Sign after sign, through all the heavenly zone.  
 Beautiful, as at first, ascends the star  
 From odoriferous Ind, whose office is  
 To gather home betimes the æthereal flock,  
 To pour them o'er the skies again at eve,  
 And to discriminate the night and day.—COWPER.

Gray, a century afterwards, wrote tripos verses,

at Cambridge, on the subject, 'Anne Luna est habitabilis?'

In 1627, anno ætatis 18, Milton wrote his elegy 'Ad Thomam Junium præceptorem suum, apud mercatores Anglicos Hamburgæ agentes, Pastoris munere fungentem.' This Thomas Young was Milton's tutor before he went to St. Paul's school. He was a Puritan, of Scotch birth. He returned to England in 1628, and was afterwards preferred by the parliament to the mastership of Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1644, whence he was ejected for refusing the engagement. He died, and was buried at Stow-market, in Suffolk, where he had been vicar thirty years.\*

From Young, Milton says that he received his first introduction to poetry.

Primus ego Aonios, illo præeunte, recessus  
Lustrabam, et bifidi sacra vireta jugi;  
Pieriosque hausi latices, Clioque favente,  
Castalio sparsi læta ter ora mero.

\* See Mitford's Poetical Dedication to his edition of Parnell.

## CHAPTER III.

THE SUBJECT OF MILTON'S COLLEGE POETRY  
CONTINUED.

It does not appear at what exact date Milton wrote his beautiful Latin poem to his father, (who lived till 1647,) excusing his devotion to the Muses: it was probably before he left Cambridge. Though it assumes that his father did not oppose his pursuits, yet I think we may infer that he had endeavoured to persuade him to occupy himself with some lucrative profession:—

*Nec tu perge, precor, sacras contemnere Musas, &c.*

The poet ends in this noble manner:—

*Et vos, o nostri, juvenilia carmina, lusus,  
Si modo perpetuos sperare audebitis annos,  
Et domini superesse rogo, lucemque tueri,  
Nec spisso rapiunt oblivia nigra sub Orco;  
Forsitan has laudes, decantatumque parentis  
Nomen, ad exemplum, sero servabitis ævo.*

This is an aspiration which Warton praises with congenial enthusiasm; and which was duly fulfilled to its utmost extent.

This poem may be taken as perfectly biogra-

phical, as well as poetical: I think it proper, therefore, to give the whole poem, as translated by Cowper.

## TO HIS FATHER.

(TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM COWPER.)

O, that Pieria's spring would through my breast  
 Pour its inspiring influence, and rush  
 No rill, but rather an o'erflowing flood !  
 That, for my venerable Father's sake,  
 All meaner themes renounced, my Muse on wings  
 Of duty borne, might reach a loftier strain.  
 For thee, my Father ! howsoe'er it please,  
 She frames this slender work : nor know I aught  
 That may thy gifts more suitably requite ;  
 Though to requite them suitably, would ask  
 Returns much nobler, and surpassing far  
 The meagre stores of verbal gratitude ;  
 But such as I possess, I send thee all :  
 This page presents thee in their full amount  
 With thy son's treasures, and the sum is nought ;  
 Nought save the riches that from airy dream,  
 In secret grottos and in laurel bowers,  
 I have by golden Clio's gift acquired.

Verse is a work divine : despise not thou  
 Verse, therefore, which evinces (nothing more)  
 Man's heavenly source, and which, retaining still  
 Some scintillations of Promethean fire,  
 Bespeaks him animated from above.  
 The gods love verse : the infernal powers themselves  
 Confess the influence of verse, which stirs  
 The lowest deep, and binds in triple chains  
 Of adamant both Pluto and the shades.  
 In verse the Delphic priestess, and the pale  
 Tremulous sibyl, make the future known :  
 And he who sacrifices, on the shrine  
 Hangs verse, both when he smites the threatening bull,  
 And when he spreads his reeking entrails wide  
 To scrutinize the fates involved there.

We too, ourselves, what time we seek again  
Our native skies, (and one eternal now  
Shall be the only measure of our being,)  
Crown'd all with gold, and chanting to the lyre  
Harmonious verse, shall range the courts above,  
And make the starry firmament resound :  
And even now the fiery spirit pure,  
That wheels yon circling orbs, directs, himself,  
Their mazy dance with melody of verse  
Unutterable, immortal; hearing which,  
Huge Ophiuchus holds his hiss suppress'd ;  
Orion, soften'd, drops his ardent blade,  
And Atlas stands unconscious of his load.  
Verse graced of old the feast of kings, ere yet  
Luxurious dainties, destined to the gulf  
Immense of gluttony, were known, and ere  
Lyæus deluged yet the temperate board.  
Then sat the bard a customary guest,  
To share the banquet ; and his length of locks,  
With beechen honours bound, proposed in verse  
The character of heroes, and their deeds  
To imitation : sang of chaos old ;  
Of nature's birth ; of gods that crept in search  
Of acorns fallen, and of the thunder-bolt  
Not yet produced from Etna's fiery cave :  
And what avails, at last, tune without voice,  
Devoid of matter ? Such may suit perhaps  
The rural dance, but such was ne'er the song  
Of Orpheus, whom the streams stood still to hear,  
And the oaks follow'd. Not by chords alone  
Well touch'd, but by resistless accents more  
To sympathetic tears the ghosts themselves  
He moved : these praises to his verse he owes.

Nor thou persist, I pray thee, still to slight  
The sacred Nine, and to imagine vain  
And useless powers, by whom inspired, thyself  
Art skilful to associate verse with airs  
Harmonious, and to give the human voice  
A thousand modulations, heir by right  
Indisputable of Arion's fame.  
Now say, what wonder is it, if a son

Of thine delight in verse, if so conjoin'd  
In close affinity, we sympathize  
In social arts, and kindred studies sweet ?  
Such distribution of himself to us  
Was Phœbus' choice : thou hast thy gift, and I  
Mine also ; and between us we receive,  
Father and son, the whole inspiring god.

No ! howsoe'er the semblance thou assume  
Of hate, thou hatest not the gentle Muse,  
My Father ! for thou never badst me tread  
The beaten path and broad, that leads right on  
To opulence, nor didst condemn thy son  
To the insipid clamours of the bar,  
To laws voluminous and ill observed ;  
But, wishing to enrich me more, to fill  
My mind with treasure, led'st me far away  
From city din to deep retreats, to banks  
And streams Aonian, and, with free consent,  
Didst place me happy at Apollo's side.  
I speak not now, on more important themes  
Intent, of common benefits, and such  
As nature bids, but of thy larger gifts,  
My Father ! who, when I had open'd once  
The stores of Roman rhetoric, and learn'd  
The full-toned language of the eloquent Greeks,  
Whose lofty music graced the lips of Jove,  
Thyself didst counsel me to add the flowers  
That Gallia boasts,—those too with which the smooth  
Italian his degenerate speech adorns,  
That witnesses his mixture with the Goth ;  
And Palestine's prophetic songs divine.  
To sum the whole, whate'er the heaven contains,  
The earth beneath it, and the air between,  
The rivers and the restless deep, may all  
Prove intellectual gain to me, my wish  
Concurring with thy will ; science herself,  
All cloud removed, inclines her beauteous head,  
And offers me the lip, if dull of heart  
I shrink not, and decline her gracious boon.

Go, now, and gather dross, ye sordid minds  
That covet it : what could my Father more ?

What more could Jove himself, unless he gave  
His own abode—the heaven in which he reigns?  
More eligible gifts than these were not  
Apollo's to his son, had they been safe  
As they were insecure, who made the boy  
The world's vice-luminary, bade him rule  
The radiant chariot of the day, and bind  
To his young brows his own all-dazzling wreath.  
I therefore, although last and least, my place  
Among the learned in the laurel grove  
Will hold, and where the conqueror's ivy twines,  
Henceforth exempt from the unletter'd throng  
Profane, nor even to be seen by such.  
Away, then, sleepless Care! Complaint, away!  
And Envy, with thy jealous leer malign!  
Nor let the monster Calumny shoot forth  
Her venom'd tongue at me. Detested foes!  
Ye all are impotent against my peace,  
For I am privileged, and bear my breast  
Safe and too high for your viperean wound.  
But thou, my Father! since to render thanks  
Equivalent, and to requite by deeds  
Thy liberality, exceeds my power,  
Suffice it, that I thus record thy gifts,  
And bear them treasured in a grateful mind.  
Ye, too, the favourite pastime of my youth,  
My voluntary numbers! if ye dare  
To hope longevity, and to survive  
Your master's funeral, not soon absorb'd  
In the oblivious Lethæan gulf,  
Shall to futurity perhaps convey  
This theme, and by these praises of my Sire  
Improve the fathers of a distant age.

In 1627, Milton wrote his first Latin elegy, addressed to Charles Deodate,\* in answer to a letter from Cheshire.

\* Charles Deodate, the son of Theodore, was born in 1574 at Geneva, where the family still flourishes. See Galiffe's '*Genealogies des Familles Genevoises*.' Theodore came to England, and married a lady of good birth and fortune. In



Milton's Latin epistles are written in the style of Ovid ; but the matter and language not servilely borrowed from him. It seems to me extraordinary that Milton should have taken Ovid for his model. I agree with Warton, that it would have been more probable that he would have taken Lucretius and Virgil, as more congenial to him. His poems 'Ad Patrem' and 'Mansus' I consider much superior, and in a different manner. I cannot agree that "his inherent powers of fancy and invention display themselves" much in the 'Elegies.' I suspect that the greater part of them might have been by any classical scholar of lively talents, rich in learning, and

1609 he appears to have been physician to Henry, Prince of Wales, and the Princess Elizabeth, afterwards Queen of Bohemia. He was brother of John Deodate, a learned Puritan divine, whose theological works, printed at Geneva, are well known. The family came from Lucca on account of their religion.

The following notice as to the family I am favoured with by one of its members, a learned librarian in the Public Library of Geneva. It is extracted from a letter written by Theodore, the father of Charles Deodate, and dated London, 20th March, 1675.

"Nous avons tenu le premier rang entre les familles nobles et patriciennes de tous tems à Lucques, et en sommes encore en possession ; le père de mon grand-père logea en son palais l'empereur Charles Quinte : il étoit alors gonfalonier ; auquel tems mon grand-père naquit, et l'empereur fût son parrain, et le nomma Charles, et lui donna l'enseigne des diamans, qu'il portait en son col à son départ. Nous avons eu des généraux d'armées. Le général Diodati conserva Brissac à l'empereur contre l'armée des princes d'Allemagne ; et fût tué d'une volée de canon dans Munich en Bavière. A cette heure nous avons Don Jean Diodati, chevalier de Malthe, grand prieur de Venize, cousin germain de feu mon père," &c.

practised in conversation. Not so 'Ad Patrem' or 'Mansus;' or some of the college exercises. But it is no more than justice to quote Warton's more favourable judgment on the sixth elegy, also addressed to Deodate. He says, "the transitions and corrections of this elegy are conducted with the skill and address of a master, and form a train of allusions and digressions, productive of fine sentiment and poetry. From a trifling and unimportant circumstance the reader is gradually led to great and lofty imagery."

Of all the elegies, that which pleases me most, and which I consider far the most poetical, and at the same time the most original in its imagery, is the fifth elegy, 'In Adventum Veris,' ætatis 20, 1629.

But even here the images have not the raciness and wildness of the descriptions in his English poems. Warton speaks of it as excellent in all the requisites of poetry.

Here Milton says that his poetical genius returns in the spring: in later life, he has said that the autumn was the season of his composition.

The last elegy is, perhaps, the best, next to that upon the Spring. Milton was apt to encumber his poetry with too many learned allusions, which unfitted them for the general readers, who might have taste and sympathy without much technical erudition.

At this period, Milton's mind, though his English poems prove that at times it was grave and deep, yet occasionally showed all the playfulness

of his youthful age. I am not sure that I like his Ovidian graces. I prefer the solemn tones of his grander imagery ; his picturesque descriptions of the scenery of nature ; his voices among the lonely mountains ; his evening contemplations, and his studious melancholy by the night-lamp. I prefer his allusions to the fables of Gothic romance rather than to the pantheon of the classics, which does not carry with it any part of our belief. Our imaginations can easily enter into the superstitions of the dark ages, which have far more of dignity and sublimity.

Perhaps Milton was at this date more proud of his scholarship than of his own original genius, as Petrarch to the last preferred his own Latin poems to his Italian, and placed on them his hopes of fame. But in a language which is not our own, we can never equally express our un-borrowed thoughts. In bringing our phraseology to the test, we are driven to the train of mind of others. It is only when the language rises up with the mental conception, that it is racy and vigorous. Hence in my opinion there is a radical defect in all modern Latin poetry—though it may still have great merit of a secondary sort. I deny that Milton shows in these Latin compositions, unless perhaps on some rare occasion, any thing of the peculiarity of his native genius.

In his own tongue there are bursts of that mind which produced ‘Paradise Lost,’ even in his verses from the age of thirteen. Sometimes an image,—sometimes an epithet displays it. A

holy inspiration had already commenced in his mind. The tone of the Sacred Writings had taken fast possession of his enthusiasm: this perhaps was increased by his study of Dante. In Spenser there is more profusion and more flexibility; but not the same sombre and sublime cast: in Shakspeare also, there is more sweetness, and less study,—more of the “native wood-note wild;”—but not that solemn and divine strain, as if an oracle spoke. There is a sort of prophetic awe in the out-breathings of Milton, like that of the Hebrew poetry: yet there is nothing totally uncompounded with human learning. Perhaps it were better, if it had been. It is occasionally encumbered.

Milton conforms every thing to his own grand inventions. Shakspeare enters into the souls of others: Spenser brings them upon the stage in groups, in all the allegorical fabulousness of their outward forms;—he is the painter of the times of chivalry, moralized into fictions of his own, which display the different virtues in the adventures of different knights; they form wonderful tales of inexhaustible variety,—giants, and enchanted castles, and imprisoned damsels, rescued by heroic courage and divine interference.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ON L'ALLEGRO AND IL PENNEROSO.

MILTON left the university of Cambridge in 1632, at the age of twenty-three, and retired to the villa of his father at Horton in Buckinghamshire: here he wrote those juvenile poems, which are the most celebrated. The exact date of the 'L'Allegro,' and 'Il Penneroso,' is not known: it is evident that they were suggested by a poem in Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy,' and by a few beautiful stanzas of Beaumont and Fletcher. These poems are familiar to all: they are rich in picturesque description of natural imagery, selected and combined with the power of splendid genius, according to the opposite humours of cheerfulness and contemplative melancholy; and are the more attractive, because they paint Milton's individual taste, character, and habits. The style of the scenery is principally adapted to the spot and neighbourhood where he now lived.

But if I may venture the opinion, I will own that these are not the compositions in which the peculiarity of the grandeur of Milton's genius dis-

plays itself. Beautiful as these Odes are, there are others, besides Milton, who might have written them:—not many indeed. They have not the solemnity,—the dim and unearthly visions,—the awful and gigantic grandeur,—the prophetic enthusiasm,—the terrible roll and bound and swell of the ‘Hymn on the Nativity.’ The subject did not call for such merits;—but then, if they are excellent, they are excellent in an inferior walk.

Probably I shall be thought heterodox in this judgment. I much prefer ‘*Il Penseroso*’ to ‘*L’Allegro*,’ as more solemn, more deep-coloured, and more original in its imagery. Perhaps the general merit of these two pieces lies more in a selection of rural pictures combined with taste, than in particular images,—except in a few passages of the latter poem. The metre wants variety and sonorousness.

The passages I chiefly allude to, are Contemplation—

Him that yon soars on golden wing,  
down to

—the far-off curfeu sound,  
Over some wide-water’d shore,  
Swinging slow with sullen roar.

Again:

Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career;  
down to the end.

In general, there is more of description than of sentiment, more of the material than of the immaterial, in these two compositions: but there are some parts of them which are very important to the illustration of the poet’s character. The poet describes a very early period of the morning,

“by selecting and assembling such picturesque objects,” says Warton, “as were familiar to an early riser. He is waked by the lark, and goes into the fields: the sun is just emerging, and the clouds are still hovering over the mountains: the cocks are crowing, and, with their lively notes, scatter the lingering remains of darkness. Human labours and employments are renewed with the dawn of day: the hunter, formerly much earlier at his sport than at present, is beating the covert; and the slumbering morn is roused with the cheerful echo of hounds and horns: the mower is whetting his scythe to begin his work; the milk-maid, whose business is of course at daybreak, comes abroad singing; the shepherd opens his fold, and takes the tale of his sheep, to see if any were lost in the night,” &c. line 67.

When he sees towers and battlements bosomed high in tufted trees, the same excellent commentator says, “it is the great mansion-house in Milton’s early days, before the old-fashioned architecture had given way to modern arts and improvements. Turrets and battlements were conspicuous marks of the numerous new buildings of King Henry VIII., and of some rather more ancient, many of which yet remained in their original state unchanged and undecayed: nor was that style, in part at least, quite omitted in Inigo Jones’s first manner; where only a little is seen, more is left to the imagination. These symptoms of an old palace, especially when thus disposed, have a greater effect than a discovery of larger parts,

and even a full display of the whole edifice. The embosomed battlements, and the spreading top of the tall grove, on which they reflect a reciprocal charm, still farther interest the fancy from the novelty of combination; while just enough of the towering structure is shown to make an accompaniment to the tufted expanse of venerable verdure, and to compose a picturesque association. With respect to their rural residence, there was a coyness in our gothic ancestors: modern seats are seldom so deeply ambushed: they disclose all their glories at once; and never excite expectation by concealment, by gradual approaches, and by interrupted appearances."

At line 131, the poet alludes to a stage worthy of his presence:—

Then to the well-trod stage anon,  
If Jonson's learned sock be on;  
Or sweetest Shakspeare, fancy's child,  
Warble his native wood-notes wild.

Milton had not yet gone such extravagant lengths in puritanism, as to join with his reforming brethren in condemning the stage.

By "trim gardens" (Il Pens. l. 50), Milton means those gardens of elaborate artifice and extravagance, of which Bacon has given a description; some of which I still remember in existence, in my own boyhood, sixty years ago. There was a sort of magnificence and variety about them, in some respects more interesting than modern bareness. I often wish them back;—the terraces, the slopes, the wilderness-walks, the mazes, the alleys, the garden-plots, the gravel-walks, the bowers, the



summer-houses, the bowling-greens, have been too rudely and indiscriminately swept away.

Where the poet says, line 109,

Or call up him who left half-told

The story of Cambuscan bold,

he expresses his admiration of Chaucer, "the father of English poetry," says Warton, "who is here distinguished by a story remarkable for the wildness of its invention; and hence Milton seems to make a very pertinent and natural transition to Spenser, whose 'Faëry Queene,' although it externally professes to treat of tournaments and the trophies of knightly valour, of forests drear and terrific enchantments, is yet allegorical, and contains a remote meaning concealed under the veil of a fabulous story and of a typical narrative, which is not immediately perceived. Spenser sings in sage and solemn tunes, with respect to his morality, and the dignity of his stanza. In the mean time, it is to be remembered that there were other great bards, and of the romantic class, who sang in such tunes, and who mean 'more than meets the ear.' Both Tasso and Ariosto pretend to an allegorical and mysterious meaning; and Tasso's enchanted forest, the most conspicuous fiction of the kind, might have been here intended. Berni allows that his incantations, giants, magic gardens, monsters, and other romantic imageries, may amuse the ignorant, but that the intelligent have more penetration. Orl. Inam. l. i. c. xxv.

Ma voi ch'avete gl'intelletti sani,

Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde

Sotto queste coperte alte e profonde.

“One is surprised,” continues Warton, “that Milton should have delighted in romances: the images of feudal and royal life which those books afford, agreed not at all with his system. A passage should here be cited from our author’s ‘Apology for Smectymnus:’—‘I may tell you whither my younger feet wandered: I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood,’ &c. The extraordinary and most imaginative, but inconsistent poet, exclaims, line 155,

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloisters pale, &c.

Being educated at St. Paul’s school, contiguous to the church, he thus became impressed with an early reverence for the solemnities of the ancient ecclesiastical architecture,—its vaults, shrines, ailes, pillars, and painted glass, rendered yet more awful by the accompaniment of the choral service.”

It is unnecessary to copy the opinion which Johnson gives of ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘Il Penseroso,’ because it is in every one’s hands. Johnson yet allows that “they are two noble efforts of imagination.”—They would be noble for a common poet; but not comparatively for Milton: I cannot allow them that high invention which belongs to the bard of ‘Paradise Lost.’ Warton criticises Johnson’s comment with a just severity:—“Never,” says he, “were fine imagery and fine imagination so marred, mutilated, and impoverished by a cold, unfeeling, and imperfect representation.”

—"No part of 'L'Allegro,'" says Johnson, "is made to arise from the pleasures of the bottle." What sad vulgarity! Who could suspect that Milton would write a Bacchanalian song?

It seems to me that these two poems are much more valuable for their development of Milton's studies and amusements, than for their poetry, by proving his love of nature,—of books,—of solitude,—of contemplation,—of all that is beautiful, and all that is romantic,—than for those bold figures, and that glorious fiction, which were his power and his chief delight. Observation and an accurate copy of the external appearances of nature do not make the highest poetry: to copy always restrains the imagination.

When we make things after our own fashion, we have the ascendancy over them: it is better to deal with the invisible world than with the visible; but we ought to associate them together: mere description is always imperfect: all the grandeur of natural scenery will not avail, unless by its tendency to operate on the human mind. This is the spell of Gray's poetry: this makes the charm of Collins' 'Ode to Evening': this is the magic of the poetical part of Cowley's 'Essays': all those parts of Shakspeare's dramas which break into pure poetry, are of this cast. It is a charm, which, to my apprehension, was scarce ever reached by Dryden or Pope: Byron repeatedly reached it; sometimes he was extravagant: Wordsworth absolutely deals in it. All impression on the mind is nothing, unless the mind throws back its own colours upon it.

All the labour and all the art in the world will do nothing for poetry : they may draw copiously and freely from a cistern which they have previously filled with borrowed water ; but the water will be stale, vapid, and good for nothing.

I have said the more on these two lyrics of Milton, because they are so much more universal favourites than some of his diviner compositions. The greater part of the images are within every one's observance ; but this is not, I think, a high merit : the poet's eyes should "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name." Here the images, for the most part, are such as actually exist bodily : the touches upon their most picturesque features are, indeed, exquisite ; and here and there are passages of ærial music unknown to common ears : but then the want of dignity, of the "long-resounding pace" in the versification, lessens the magic. The whole is written lightly, and upon the surface : the poet skims away, just touches with his wings, and goes on : he does not here rise in slow and majestic dignity to the sun ; hovering sometimes on his mighty pinions, and seeming to hang over the earth, as if his eye was penetrating into its depths ; and then, as if with an angel's power, again darting into the upper regions of the sky.

I can scarcely suppose that these two pieces cost Milton any labour, or time, or strong exercise of mind : each of them might easily have been produced by him in a few hours : but there is an abstraction of mind, a visionary enthusiasm, which requires a very different sort of nursing :

in that state Milton must have been in his sublimer compositions. Here he deals with nothing difficult, nor enters into the mysteries of the soul.

If I say that there is not much sentiment in these descriptions, I shall probably be answered, that the images are selected by sentiment, and so arranged as to produce a particular tone of sentiment. If it be so, the sentiment is not brought out; and the poet ought not to trust to others to bring out that which he ought to express himself. It will not be pretended that there is any moral pathos here; and moral pathos is assuredly one of the finest spells of poetry. Pathos cannot be produced by a writer who has not a visionary presence of the objects which produce it: but it were better to give more of the pathos, and less of the objects.

This faculty, indeed, was not Milton's chief excellence: now and then he is pathetic in 'Paradise Lost,' but he has none of Shakspeare's human pathos: he was too stern and heroic for tears.

It is rarely that I get into a different track of criticism from Warton; but Warton was perhaps too exclusively fond of imagery and descriptions, and therefore has estimated the poems, of which I am now speaking, higher than I do. Warton also wanted pathos, but he was not without a gentle and kindly sentiment.

These descriptive poems had long fallen into oblivion, when, about 1740, they were revived by the Wartons, who formed a school upon them. Like all schools, when they once took up the

thing, they carried it too far: but Collins, in his 'Ode to Evening,' stopped precisely at the true point: Gray caught some of the infusion; and I suspect, that in two or three images or epithets, he was indebted to Collins; but did not owe his tone to the Warton school, being rather their senior, and drinking from the original fountains, not only of Milton, but still more of the Italians, as well as of the classics. Altogether, the cast and combination of the 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard' is his own, though he may have borrowed particular ingredients. His is a perfect model, *sui generis*. Joseph Warton's 'Ode to Fancy' is an attempted echo of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' indeed, almost a cento.

## CHAPTER V.

## ON LYCIDAS, AND EPITAPHIUM DAMONIS.

EDWARD KING, fellow of Christ College, Cambridge, the friend of Milton, passing over to Ireland to visit his friends, the ship struck on a rock on the English coast, August 10th, 1637, when all on board perished. He was son of Sir John King, knight, secretary for Ireland under Queen Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I. At Cambridge, Edward King was distinguished for his piety and proficiency in polite letters. ‘*Lycidas*,’ which laments his death, first appeared in the Cambridge collection of verses on that occasion, 1638.

Dr. Johnson’s censure on this poem is gross and tasteless: it is disgraceful only to the critic. He has treated with insolent rudeness one tenfold greater than himself: he has set the example; and why should *he* be spared? I will endeavour to discuss this question with the utmost impartiality, and confer neither praise nor blame from unfounded prejudice.

This poem is so far from deserving the charac-

ter applied to it by Johnson, that “the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing,”—that the language is throughout imaginative and picturesque, and the rhythm harmonious and enchanting: there is no poem in which the epithets are more beautiful, more appropriate, and more fresh: they are like the diction of no predecessor, but of some of the occasional passages of rural description by Shakspeare in his happiest modes: the outburst at the commencement is eminently striking, and rich with poetry: the images that present themselves, and the transitions, are always natural, and sometimes sublime: they have this difference from those of ‘*L’Allegro*’ and ‘*Il Penseroso*,’ that they are more spiritual; that is, they are more mingled up with intellect: they are not purely material. As to the poem being pastoral, Johnson might much more object to the *Psalms*; as in Addison’s beautiful version,—

The Lord my pasture shall prepare, &c.

where the Deity himself is represented in the character of a shepherd.

But it will be asked, what invention there is in this poem? There is invention in the epithets, in the combinations, in the descriptions, in the apostrophes, in the visionary parts of the poem, in the sorrows, the predictions, and the consolations: in all those associations, which none but a rich and poetical mind produces.

Johnson had so accustomed himself to cultivate



dry reason only, that he thought all array of imagery idle and useless. If he had any feeling, it was only when he argued himself into it; it did not come from the senses: he loved abstraction; but it was not the abstraction of shadows, nor the "bodying forth" of "airy nothings." Milton's mind was in a blaze, surrounded by a whole range of invisible worlds and their aërial inhabitants: his genius gave to matter an ideal light and ideal properties: he connected the dignity of human existence with the beauty and the grandeur of the scenery of nature.

The epithets which true poets give to imagery confer upon it its spell: 'Lycidas' is full of these epithets from beginning to end: they are always fresh and exquisitely vivid, but never extravagant or over-ornamental.

The versification is as regular as is consistent with vigour and variety: the five-foot lines are far preferable to the shorter lines of the two poems before discussed.

'Lycidas' is full of learned allusions, perhaps too full,—which was Milton's fault.

Dr. Joseph Warton has truly said, that the admiration or dislike of this poem is an infallible test whether a reader has or has not a poetical taste: he who is not enraptured with it can have no genuine idea of poetry.

If we are asked what puts all within the range of mind before us in such brilliant or such affecting colours, we can only say that it is indefinable, but that we cannot doubt its effects. All se-

condary poets attempt this by a false gloss: they are full of ornament; but the ornament is a glare, or a set of artificial flowers: there is no fragrance,—no vivifying spirit. In a true poet, like Milton, all springs up unsought from the fountain of the soul or the heart: it is an enthusiasm; but an enthusiasm not unapproved by the sober judgment and the conscience. Nothing is good, which there is not some susceptibility within us ready instantly to recognize: nothing can be forced upon us by artful effort: no factitious gilding will avail. The poet's difficulty is to find expressions for what he really feels.

Now and then there may be a momentary blaze in inferior authors; but, in bards like Milton, all is one texture of light.

Just before Milton's return from Italy in 1639, his friend Charles Deodate died, and the news met him on his arrival: he then wrote a Latin elegy on him, entitled '*Epitaphium Damonis*,' which has some similitude to '*Lycidas*.' Warton says that there are in it some new and natural country images, and the common topics are often recommended by a novelty of elegant expression: it contains some passages which wander far beyond the bounds of bucolic song, and are in his own original style of the more sublime poetry. Milton cannot be a shepherd long: his own native powers break forth, and cannot bear the assumed disguise.

At line 155 of this elegy, he hints his design of writing an epic poem on some part of the ancient

British story. So, in his poem entitled ‘*Mansus*,’ he says,

*Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,  
Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem.*

These are the ancient kings of Britain: this was the subject for an epic poem that first occupied his mind. King Arthur, at his death, was supposed to be carried into the subterraneous land of fairy or of spirits, where he still reigned as a king; and whence he was to return into Britain, to renew the round table, conquer all his enemies, and re-establish his throne: he was therefore “*etiam movens bella sub terris*,” still meditating wars under the earth. The impulse of Milton’s attachment to this subject was not entirely suppressed: it produced his ‘*History of Britain*.’ By the expression, “*revocabo in carmina*,” the poet means, that these ancient kings, which were once the themes of the British bards, should now again be celebrated in verse. Milton, in his ‘*Church Government*,’ written in 1641, says that, after the example of Tasso, “it haply would be no rashness, from an equal diligence and inclination, to present the like offer in one of our own ancient stories!” It is possible that the advice of Manso, the friend of Tasso, might determine the poet to a design of this kind.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ON COMUS.

IN 1634, Milton wrote his immortal 'Mask of Comus,' for John Egerton, first Earl of Bridgewater, then Lord president of Wales, to be presented at Ludlow-castle, which was his Lordship's residence.

The poet's father held his house under the Earls of Bridgewater, at Horton, near Harefield, and not far from Ashridge: thus, perhaps, was the poet introduced to that noble family: he certainly had not yet become a decided puritan and republican. The Countess of Derby, (Alice Spencer) mother-in-law of the Earl of Bridgewater, and also widow of Lord Chancellor Egerton, was a generous patroness of poets, and, among the rest, of her relation, the author of the 'Faëry Queene.' Such a patroness would be, above all others, grateful to Milton.

'Comus' was acted by the Earl's children, the Lord Brackley, Mr. Thomas Egerton, and the Lady Alice Egerton.

The Egertons were among the most powerful of

the nobility, and lived in the most state. By a marriage with a co-heiress of the great feudal family of Stanley, who were co-heirs to the royal races of Tudor and Plantagenet; they held a sort of demi-regal respect. Their domains were large, and their character for hospitality and accomplishments stood high. This historical house have a century afterwards rendered themselves again immortal by designing and patronizing national works of another class.\*

Masks had been common in the time of Ben Jonson. I leave to antiquaries to trace the origin of the subject and design of 'Comus.' The merit lies not in the hint but in the superstructure. The story is said to have been occasioned by a domestic incident of the Egerton family.

When we open this poem, we seem to enter on the beings and language of another world. Every word is poetry.

The first of the *dramatis personæ* is the Spirit, whose speech runs to ninety-two lines. It is of the deepest interest to the piece, and opens to us the sovereignty of Neptune—the quartering of our island to his blue-haired deities—the parentage of Comus—his dangerous arts, and the Spirit's own protecting intervention.

\* The canal navigation of the last Duke of Bridgewater, who died in 1803, is celebrated all over the world. The last two Earls, who succeeded him, were indeed less eminent, and dimmed—the former by his mediocrity, the latter by his eccentricities—some of the lustre of the name. The last died in 1829. Such are the chances and changes of time.

Next comes Comus attended by his monstrous rout, whom he thus addresses :—

The star that bids the shepherd fold  
Now the top of heaven doth hold, &c.

The noise of their revelry calls the attention of the Lady, who now enters :

This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,  
My best guide now.

“By laying the scene of this Mask,” Warton observes, “in a wild forest, Milton secured to himself a perpetual fund of picturesque description, which, resulting from situation, was always at hand. He was not obliged to go out of his way for this striking embellishment: it was suggested of necessity by present circumstances. The same happy choice of scene supplied Sophocles in ‘*Philoctetes*,’ Shakspeare in ‘*As You Like It*,’ and Fletcher in the ‘*Faithful Shepherdess*,’ with frequent and even unavoidable opportunities of rural delineation; and that of the most romantic kind. But Milton has had additional advantages: his forest is not only the residence of a magician, but is exhibited under the gloom of midnight. Fletcher, however, to whom Milton is confessedly indebted, avails himself of the latter circumstance.”

The lady exclaims,

A thousand phantasies  
Begin to throng into my memory,  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And æry tongues, that syllable men’s names  
On sands, and shores, and desert wildernesses.

Warton says, “I remember these superstitions,

which are here finely applied, in the ancient voyages of Marco Paolo the Venetian, speaking of the vast and perilous desert of Lop in Asia, ‘*Cernuntur et audiuntur, in eo interdiu, et sæpius noctu, dæmonum variæ illusiones. Unde viatoribus summe cavendum est, ne multum ab invicem seipsos dissociant, aut aliquis a tergo sese diutius impediat. Alioquin, quamprimum propter montes et calles quispiam comitum suorum aspectum perdiderit, non facile ad eos perveniet: nam audiuntur ibi voces dæmonum, qui solitarie incedentes propriis appellant nominibus, voces fingentes illorum quos comitari se putant, ut a recto itinere abductos in perniciem deducant.*’—De Regionib. Oriental. l. i. c. 44. But there is a mixture from Fletcher’s ‘Faithful Shepherdess,’ A. r. S. i. p. 108. The shepherdess mentions, among other nocturnal terrors in a wood, ‘Or voices calling me in dead of night.’ These fancies from Marco Paolo are adopted in Heylin’s ‘Cosmographie,’ I am not sure if in any of the three editions printed before ‘Comus’ appeared.”\* The song on Echo is more exquisite than any thing of its kind in our language.

“Comus,” says Warton, “is universally allowed to have taken some of its tints from the ‘Tempest.’”

The following is a beautiful passage:—

’Tis most true  
That musing meditation most affects  
The pensive secrecy of desert cell,  
Far from the cheerful haunt of men and herds,  
And sits as safe as in a senate-house.

\* See lib. iii. p. 201., edit. 1652, fol. Sylvestre in Du Bartas, has also the tradition in the text ed. fol. ut supr. p. 274.

On which Warton has the following somewhat singular note :—"Not many years after this was written, Milton's friends showed that the safety of a senate-house was not inviolable : but when the people turn legislators, what place is safe from the tumults of innovation, and the insults of disobedience?" True — if uncontrolled by king and lords, as they have lately attempted to be.

The poet, speaking of chastity, says,

Yea, there, where very desolation dwells,  
By grotts and caverns shagg'd with horrid shades,  
She may pass on with unblench'd majesty,  
Be it not done in pride, or in presumption.

Dr. Joseph Warton remarks, in his 'Essay on Pope,' that poet's imitation of this and other passages of Milton's juvenile poems. "This is the first instance," adds Thomas Warton, "of any degree even of the slightest attention being paid to Milton's smaller poems by a writer of note since their first publication. Milton was never mentioned or acknowledged as an English poet till after the appearance of 'Paradise Lost;' and long after that time these pieces were totally forgotten and overlooked. It is strange that Pope, by no means of a congenial spirit, should be the first who copied 'Comus' or 'Il Penseroso.' But Pope was a gleaner of the old English poets ; and he was here pilfering from obsolete English poetry, without the least fear or danger of being detected."

At l. 780 the lady says,

To him that dares  
Arm his profane tongue with contemptuous words



Against the sun-clad power of chastity,  
Fain would I something say, yet to what end?  
Thou hast nor ear, nor soul to apprehend  
The sublime notion, and high mystery,  
That must be utter'd to unfold the sage  
And serious doctrine of virginity;  
And thou art worthy that thou shouldst not know  
More happiness than this thy present lot.

Upon this passage, also, Warton has the following curious note:—

“By studying the reveries of the Platonic writers, Milton contracted a theory concerning chastity and the purity of love, in the contemplation of which, like other visionaries, he indulged his imagination with ideal refinements, and with pleasing but unmeaning notions of excellence and perfection. Plato's sentimental or metaphysical love, he seems to have applied to the natural love between the sexes. The very philosophical dialogue of the Angel and Adam, in the eighth book of ‘Paradise Lost,’ altogether proceeds on this doctrine. In the ‘Smectymnuus’ he declares his initiation into the mysteries of this immaterial love. ‘Thus from the laureate fraternity of poets, riper years, and the ceaseless round of study and reading, led me to the shady spaces of philosophy; but chiefly to the divine volume of Plato, and his equal Xenophon; where, if I should tell ye what I learned of chastity and love, I mean that which is truly so,’ &c. But in the dialogue just mentioned, where Adam asks his celestial guest, ‘Whether angels are susceptible of love, whether they express their passion by looks

only, or by a mixture of irradiation, by virtual or immediate contact?" our author seems to have overleaped the Platonic pale, and to have lost his way among the solemn conceits of Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. It is no wonder that the angel blushed, as well as smiled, at some of these questions."

The incomparable poem of 'Comus' thus ends:—

Mortals, that would follow me,  
Love Virtue; she alone is free;  
She can teach ye how to climb  
Higher than the sphery chime;  
Or if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

Thyer says, that "the moral of this poem is very finely summed up in the six concluding lines. The thought contained in the last two might probably be suggested to our author by a passage in the 'Table of Cebes,' where Patience and Perseverance are represented stooping and stretching out their hands to help up those who are endeavouring to climb the craggy hill of Virtue, and yet are too feeble to ascend of themselves."

Mr. Francis Egerton (afterwards the last Earl of Bridgewater) has observed upon this, that, "had this ingenious critic duly reflected on the lofty mind of Milton,

Smit with the love of sacred song,

and so often and so sublimely employed on topics of religion, he might readily have found a subject, to which the poet obviously and divinely alludes in these concluding lines, without fetching

the thought from the 'Table of Cebes.' In the preceding attack I am convinced Mr. Thyer had no ill intention; but by overlooking so clear and pointed an allusion to a subject calculated to kindle that lively glow in the bosom of every Christian, which the poet intended to excite, and by referring it to an image in a profane author, he may, beside stifling the sublime effect so happily produced, afford a handle to some in these 'evil days,' who are willing to make the religion of Socrates and Cebes (or that of Nature) supersede the religion of Christ. The moral of this poem is, indeed, very finely summed up in the six concluding lines, in which, to wind up one of the most elegant productions of his genius,

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
threw up his last glance to Heaven, in rapt contemplation of that stupendous mystery, whereby He, the lofty theme of *Paradise Regained*, stooped from above all height, 'bowed the Heavens and came down on Earth,' to atone as man for the sins of men, to strengthen feeble Virtue by the influence of his grace, and to teach her to ascend his throne."

Numerous critics, from Toland to Todd, have given the character of this poem; but Thomas Warton's is by far the best: Johnson, with some good passages, has intermixed much captious objection, and not a little vulgarity. He cannot refrain from a sort of coarse sneer, which affects to be humour.

"We must not," says Warton, "read *Comus*

with an eye to the stage, or with the expectation of dramatic propriety. Under this restriction the absurdity of the Spirit speaking to an audience in a solitary forest at midnight, and the want of reciprocation in the dialogue, are overlooked. 'Comus' is a suite of speeches, not interesting by discrimination of character; not conveying a variety of incidents, nor gradually exciting curiosity; but perpetually attracting attention by sublime sentiment, by fanciful imagery of the richest vein, by an exuberance of picturesque description, poetical allusion, and ornamental expression." To this the critic adds many other excellent observations.

A Mask, written for a private theatre, and to be performed by highly-educated actors, is not like a play to be exhibited to a mixed and common audience: long speeches, therefore, of a tone too lofty for vulgar ears, are not here objectionable. Of the texture of the present composition every word is eminently poetical. Passages of similar beauty may be found in Shakspeare, and even in Fletcher,—but not a uniform and unbroken web. It is true that there is little passion in this dramatic poem; but none is pretended to: while it is enchantingly descriptive, it is at the same time philosophically calm. We are carried into a fairy region of good Spirits and bad: and every thing of rural scenery that is delightful, associated with wild and picturesque beliefs of an invisible world in mountains, valleys, forests, and rivers, is introduced to keep up the magic. Were

it a mere description of inanimate nature, it would be comparatively dull. Here, too, a beautiful girl, of high rank, richly accomplished in mind, is introduced, to pour out under alarming circumstances a divine eloquence of exalted and affecting sentiment. Virtue and truth, and purity of intellect and heart, break out at every word. To these strains who can deny poetical invention? What definition of poetry can be given, by which this Mask can be excluded from a very high place? Is it not every where either brilliant and picturesque or lofty fiction? It is said that the characters have no passion; but how is passion a necessary ingredient of poetry? Poetry must create; but it may create beings of tranquil beauty, and calm exaltation. Cavillers say, that the Brothers ought not to philosophize, while the Sister is left alone in the dangers of a solitary forest: but their faith in a protecting Providence will not allow them to think her in great danger. It may be replied that this is an improbable degree of faith. Is it a poetical improbability? It seems as if such censors think that nothing must be represented which does not occur in every-day life. Poetry is literally, and to all extent, the reverse of this.

Minor bards may give occasional touches of outward poetry by illustrations of imagery and description; but the whole structure and soul of Milton's 'Comus' is poetry: not the dress, but the intrinsic spirit, and the essence. The characters of the Attendant Spirit, and of Comus, are ex-

quisite inventions. What is copied from observation, is not always poetry; therefore Dryden and Pope were very often not poets.

There are numerous ideas implanted in our nature, which are not bodily truths, but imaginative truths: even single epithets convey these, as is shown by every part of 'Comus,' while picturesque words point out the leading features of every rural object. No such words ever appear in Dryden or Pope, unless they are borrowed. Their descriptions are general and vague: they convey fine sounds, but no precise ideas. The true poet cannot avoid seeing: images haunt him; he cannot get rid of them: he does not call up his memory to produce empty words, but he draws from the visionary shapes before him.

While Milton was framing the 'Comus,' he, no doubt, lived in the midst of his own creation: he only clothed the tongues of his characters with what it appeared to him in his vision they actually spoke.

## CHAPTER VII.

## ON THE ARCADES.

THE ‘Arcades’ was a Mask, which was part of an entertainment presented to Alice Spencer, Countess Dowager of Derby, and afterwards widow of Lord Chancellor Egerton, at Harefield in Middlesex, and acted by some noble persons of her family.

This celebrated lady was daughter of Sir John Spencer of Althorp, who was then one of the richest commoners of England. Her first husband, Earl Ferdinando, was a most accomplished nobleman, who died in the flower of his age;—it is supposed by poison, because he would not enter into the plots of the Jesuits to claim the crown from Queen Elizabeth, on account of his royal descent; for which see the famous volume, called ‘Dolman’s Conference,’ written by Parsons the Jesuit, and see also Hallam, and Hargrave.

Norden, in his ‘Speculum Britanniae,’ about 1590, speaking of Harefield, says, “There Sir Edmond Anderson, Knight, Lord-Chief-Justice of

the Common Pleas, hath a fair house, standing on the edge of the hill; the river Colne passing near the same, through the pleasant meadows and sweet pastures, yielding both delight and profit." "I viewed this house," says Warton, "a few years ago, when it was for the most part remaining in its original state. It has since been pulled down; the porter's lodges on each side of the gateway are converted into a commodious dwelling-house. It is near Uxbridge, and Milton, when he wrote 'Arcades,' was still living with his father at Horton, near Colnebrook, in the same neighbourhood. He mentions the singular felicity he had in vain anticipated in the society of his friend Deodate, on the shady banks of the river Colne:—

Imus, et argutâ paulum recubamus in umbrâ,  
Aut ad aquas Colni, &c.—*Epit. Damon.* l. 149.

Amidst the fruitful and delightful scenes of this river the nymphs and shepherds had no reason to regret, as in the third song, the Arcadian 'Ladon's liliated banks.' Unquestionably this *Mask* was a much longer performance. Milton seems only to have written the poetical part, consisting of these three songs and the recitative soliloquy of the genius: the rest was probably prose and machinery. In many of Jonson's *Masques* the poet but rarely appears, amid a cumbersome exhibition of heathen gods and mythology."

The Countess of Derby died 26th January, 1635-6, and was buried at Harefield. (See 'Lyson's Environs of London.')



Harrington has an epigram on this lady,  
B. iii. 47.

IN PRAISE OF THE COUNTESS OF DERBY, MARRIED TO THE  
LORD CHANCELLOR.

This noble Countess lived many years  
With Derby, one of England's greatest peers :  
Fruitful and fair, and of so clear a name,  
That all this region marvell'd at her fame.  
But this brave peer extinct by hasten'd fate,  
She stay'd, ah, too, too long, in widow's state ;  
And in that state took so sweet state upon her,  
All ears, eyes, tongues, heard, saw, and told her honour, &c.

But Milton is not the only great English poet who has celebrated the Countess Dowager of Derby. She was the sixth daughter, as we have seen, of Sir John Spencer, with whose family Spenser the poet claimed an alliance. In his 'Colin Clout's come home again,' written about 1595, he mentions her under the appellation of Amaryllis, with her sisters Phyllis or Elizabeth, and Charyllis or Anne; these three of Sir John Spencer's daughters being best known at court. See l. 536.

No less praiseworthy are the sisters three,  
The honour of the noble family,  
Of which I meanest boast myself to be,  
And most that unto them I am so nigh.

After a panegyric on the first two, he next comes to Amaryllis, or Alice, our lady, the dowager of Earl Ferdinando, lately deceased :—

But Amaryllis, whether fortunate,  
Or else unfortunate may I aread,  
That freed is from Cupid's yoke by fate,  
Since which she doth new bands adventure dread,

Shepherd, whatever thou hast heard to be  
In this or that praised diversely apart,  
In her thou mayest them assembled see,  
And seal'd up in the treasure of her heart.

And in the same poem he thus apostrophises to her late husband, under the name of Amyntas : see l. 434.

Amyntas quite is gone, and lies full low,  
Having his Amaryllis left to moan !  
Help, O ye shepherds ! help ye all in this,—  
Her loss is yours ; your loss Amyntas is !  
Amyntas, flower of shepherds' pride forlorn ;  
He, whilst he lived, was the noblest swain  
That ever piped on an oaten quill ;  
Both did he other, which could pipe, maintain,  
And eke could pipe himself with passing skill.

And to the same Lady Alice, when Lady Strange, before her husband Ferdinando's succession to the earldom, Spenser addressed his "Tears of the Muses," published in 1591, in a dedication of the highest regard ; where he speaks of "your excellent beauty, your virtuous behaviour, and your noble match with that most honourable lord, the very pattern of right nobility." He then acknowledges the particular bounties which she had conferred upon the poets. Thus the lady who presided at the representation of Milton's 'Arcades' was not only the theme but the patroness of Spenser. The peerage-book of this most respectable countess is the poetry of her times.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ON MILTON'S FOREIGN TRAVELS.

IN 1637, æt. twenty-nine, Milton, on the death of his mother, obtained his father's leave to visit Italy. I have already mentioned the course of his travels. The accomplished and amiable Sir Henry Wotton, whose admiration and heart had been won by the poet's 'Comus,' gave him his advice and recommendations. At Florence, Rome, and Naples, he was received with applause and kindness by all the most eminent literati. He, who had been little noticed in his own country, was received with the most distinguished honours abroad, in the country of Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso.

How happened this? Yet such is the perversity of human nature!

It is a subject of deep regret that Milton has not left a written account of his travels, with details such as modern visitors of the same and other countries give; or even such short notes as Gray sent in his letters. It is impossible to conceive any other so qualified to receive delight from these

visits as Milton. Above all other men, his mind was full of the richest and most profound classical recollections. Not only his fancy held a mirror to all the beautiful and golden scenery, and all the exquisite and grand displays of the arts of painting and sculpture, but he had a creative imagination, beyond all other men, which must have fired into a blaze at them. All with which his mind had been stored from boyhood, drawn from distant sources, must now have seemed to be realized. He saw the very identical relics of classical times embodied before his eyes : he saw clear skies, and beautiful scenes, of which we have no idea in a northern climate. The Alps and the Apeninnes, the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, and above all the bay of Naples, gave him landscapes and sea-views such as an Englishman, who has never quitted his own country, can have no conception of.

He visited Galileo, which, however, was supposed to have raised some dangerous prejudices against him : but his great friend was the Marquis Manso of Naples, who had been the friend of Tasso, and who was, himself, a poet. ‘*Ad Mansum*,’ is one of the best of his Latin poems. With what enthusiasm must Milton have entered into Tasso’s character, as well as that of Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto ! Dante’s genius was, no doubt, the nearest to his own : but in addition to the epic imagination, there is in his personal history something so striking, so melancholy, and so full of deep interest, that it adds

twofold to the attraction with which we read his poetry.

Three, at least, of these four mighty poets suffered great misfortunes: but the history of their lives is well known, and this is not the place for treating of them. We have nothing English of the same sort as their respective geniuses, unless, perhaps, Spenser. The sombreness and mystical sublimity of Dante is peculiar to himself: he has been admirably translated by Carey: he lived in a glorious time for poetry; when superstition fostered and coloured all its noblest creations; and when the chilling and false artifices of the cold critic had not yet paralysed exertion;—when all was hope and adventure, both of mind and body.

Had Milton's mind at this epoch been so strongly infected with puritanism as his enemies averred, he could not have enjoyed Italian manners and Italian genius. There he saw all the pomp and warmth of religion: puritanism had all its acidity and rigidness, and all its freezing bareness. Coming fresh from these things, of which he has expressed his delight, I know not how he could so at once plunge into principles, which would destroy them all to the very root; but such are the inconsistencies of frail humanity! Gray saw all these things with equal sensibility and taste, if not with equal genius; and he remained fixed in the love of them through life.

But it is worthy of remark, that as soon as Milton actively took the side of this cause of

destruction, the Muses left him for twenty years. Coming fresh from the living fountains of all imaginative creation, the happy delirium of glorious genius subsided into a cold and harsh stagnation of all that was eloquent and generous. The blight was more violent and effective in proportion as the bloom had been strong.

Milton did not stay long enough at any of the great Italian cities: instead of eighteen months among them all, his stay ought to have been four or five years.

I give in this place Cowper's translation of the Latin epistle to Manso.

#### TO GIOVANNI BATTISTA MANSO,

MARQUIS OF VILLA.

[“Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa, is an Italian nobleman of the highest estimation among his countrymen for genius, literature, and military accomplishments. To him Torquato Tasso addressed his ‘Dialogues on Friendship;’ for he was much the friend of Tasso, who has also celebrated him among the other princes of his country in his poem entitled ‘Gerusalemme Conquistata,’ book xx.

Fra cavalier magnanimi, e cortesi,  
Risplende il Manso.

During the author's stay at Naples, he received at the hands of the Marquis a thousand kind offices and civilities; and, desirous not to appear ungrateful, sent him this poem a short time before his departure from that city.”]

These verses also to thy praise the Nine,  
O Manso! happy in that theme, design;  
For, Gallus and Mæcenas gone, they see  
None such besides, or whom they love, as thee;  
And, if my verse may give the meed of fame,  
Thine too shall prove an everlasting name.

Already such it shines in Tasso's page,  
 For thou wast Tasso's friend, from age to age ;  
 And next, the Muse consign'd, not unaware  
 How high the charge, Marino to thy care ;  
 Who, singing to the nymphs Adonis' praise,  
 Boasts thee the patron of his copious lays.  
 To thee alone the poet would entrust  
 His latest vows ; to thee alone his dust :  
 And thou with punctual piety hast paid,  
 In labour'd brass, thy tribute to his shade.  
 Nor this contented thee—but, lest the grave  
 Should aught absorb of theirs, which thou couldst save,  
 All future ages thou hast deign'd to teach  
 The life, lot, genius, character, of each,  
 Eloquent as the Carian sage, who true  
 To his great theme, the life of Homer drew.

I, therefore, though a stranger youth, who come,  
 Chill'd by rude blasts, that freeze my northern home,  
 Thee dear to Clio, confident proclaim,  
 And thine, for Phœbus' sake, a deathless name.  
 Nor thou, so kind, wilt view with scornful eye  
 A Muse scarce rear'd beneath a northern sky ;  
 Who fears not, indiscreet as she is young,  
 To seek in Latium hearers of her song.  
 We too, where Thames with his unsullied waves  
 The tresses of the blue-hair'd ocean laves,  
 Hear oft by night, or, slumbering, seem to hear,  
 O'er his wide stream, the swan's voice warbling clear ;  
 And we could boast a Tityrus of yore,  
 Who trod, a welcome guest, yon happy shore.

Yes,—dreary as we own our northern clime,  
 Ev'n we to Phœbus raise the polish'd rhyme ;  
 We too serve Phœbus : Phœbus has received,  
 If legends old may claim to be believed,  
 No sordid gifts from us, the golden ear,  
 The burnish'd apple, ruddiest of the year,  
 The fragrant crocus, and, to grace his fane,  
 Fair damsels chosen from the Druid train ;  
 Druids, our native bards in ancient time,  
 Who gods and heroes praised in hallow'd rhyme !  
 Hence, often as the maids of Greece surround  
 Apollo's shrine with hymns of festive sound,

They name the virgins, who arrived of yore  
 With British offerings on the Delian shore :  
 Loxo, from giant Corineus sprung ;  
 Upis, on whose bless'd lips the future hung ;  
 And Hecaërge, with the golden hair,  
 All deck'd with Pictish hues, and all with bosoms bare.

Thou, therefore, happy sage, whatever clime  
 Shall ring with Tasso's praise in after-time,  
 Or with Marino's, shalt be known their friend,  
 And with an equal flight to fame ascend.  
 The world shall hear, how Phœbus and the Nine  
 Were inmates once, and willing guests of thine.  
 Yet Phœbus, when of old constrain'd to roam  
 The earth, an exile from his heavenly home,  
 Enter'd, no willing guest, Admetus' door,  
 Though Hercules had ventured there before.  
 But gentle Chiron's cave was near, a scene  
 Of rural peace, clothed with perpetual green ;  
 And thither, oft as respite he required  
 From rustic clamours loud, the god retired :  
 There many a time, on Peneus' bank reclined  
 At some oak's root, with ivy thick entwined,  
 Won by his hospitable friend's desire,  
 He soothed his pains of exile with the lyre.  
 Then shook the hills, then trembled Peneus' shore,  
 Nor Ceta felt his load of forests more ;  
 The upland elms descended to the plain,  
 And soften'd lynxes wonder'd at the strain.

Well may we think, O dear to all above !  
 Thy birth distinguish'd by the smile of Jove ;  
 And that Apollo shed his kindest power,  
 And Maia's son, on that propitious hour ;  
 Since only minds so born can comprehend  
 A poet's worth, or yield that worth a friend.  
 Hence, on thy yet unfaded cheek appears  
 The lingering freshness of thy greener years ;  
 Hence in thy front and features we admire  
 Nature unwither'd, and a mind entire.  
 O, might so true a friend to me belong,  
 So skill'd to grace the votaries of song,  
 Should I recall hereafter into rhyme  
 The kings and heroes of my native clime ;



Arthur the chief, who even now prepares,  
In subterraneous being, future wars,  
With all his martial knights, to be restored  
Each to his seat, around the federal board ;  
And, O ! if spirit fail me not, disperse  
Our Saxon plunderers in triumphant verse !  
Then, after all, when with the past content,  
A life I finish, not in silence spent,  
Should he, kind mourner, o'er my death-bed bend,  
I shall but need to say, " be yet my friend ! "  
He too, perhaps, shall bid the marble breathe  
To honour me, and with the graceful wreath,  
Or of Parnassus, or the Paphian isle,  
Shall bind my brows,—but I shall rest the while.  
Then also, if the fruits of Faith endure,  
And Virtue's promised recompense be sure,  
Born to those seats, to which the blest aspire  
By purity of soul, and virtuous fire,  
These rites, as Fate permits, I shall survey  
With eyes illumined by celestial day ;  
And, every cloud from my pure spirit driven,  
Joy in the bright beatitude of Heaven !

We may conceive what delight Milton had in talking with Manso about Tasso, and how it encouraged his own desire of poetical immortality. The honours paid to Tasso as a poet were of a kind of which the cold northern clime of England gave no example. Spenser had died in poverty, ruined and neglected : Shakspeare seems to have been little personally known in his lifetime ; for nothing is recorded of his habits and private character.

But though Tasso was cruelly used by his inglorious and base prince, his countrymen worshipped him, and bore with all his eccentricities. In England, except by Chaucer and Spenser, there had been no great epics of fiction. The

metrical narratives were, for the most part, dull chronicles : that fiery force, where life breathes in every line and every image, was almost unknown. It is by the invention of grand fables that poets must stand high : little patches of flowers—a style of similes and metaphors, will not do. The manners and credences of Europe, from the commencement of the crusades, afforded inexhaustible subjects of heroic poetry : fictions improved upon the romantic tales of the Provençal bards could never be wanting to the imagination or the lyre.

Milton returned by Venice, where he made a large collection of music for his father ; and thence passed through Geneva, at which he made a short sojourn with John Deodate, a learned theologian and professor, the relation of his friend Charles Deodate, and became acquainted with Frederic Spanheim. Here he is supposed to have renewed his Calvinistic and puritanical prejudices. It is somewhat strange that this small place should have been the focus of all that troubled the governments of Europe for more than a century. They were not content with forming a republican government for their own petty canton, for which it was well suited, but struggled to turn all the great monarchies into republics.

The poet must have been delighted with the lake-scenery and Alpine summits of this magnificent country : yet, after the pomp of Italy, its splendid arts, its princely societies, its genial

skies, its imaginative delights, men must have seemed here to have dwindled into formal and dull automatons. Here might be learning; but it was dry and tasteless: here was now no Beza, or D'Aubigné; nor any anticipation of the eloquent and passionate Rousseau, or spiritual De Stael, or historic and philosophical Sismondi.

I have endeavoured to find some traces of Milton's visit in Geneva; but have yet discovered none. I am told it is a mistake that the Deodate campagne at the adjoining village of Cologny on the Savoy side, which Byron inhabited in 1816, was that which belonged to the Deodate family when Milton was here. In the 'Livre des Anglais,' preserved in the state-archives at the Hotel de Ville, are registers of the English (including John Knox), who took refuge here from 1554 to 1558, and had an English chapel in Geneva.

## CHAPTER IX.

ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF MILTON'S PROSE  
WORKS.

IN 1639 Milton returned to England: he had the grief of finding that his friend Charles Deodate was already dead: on that occasion he wrote the Latin pastoral entitled 'Epitaphium Damonis.' He now undertook the tutorship of his two nephews, John and Edward Phillips, and added to them some other pupils. Having professed to have been drawn back to England to take a part in the cause of liberty, then breaking out into open contest, Johnson considers this occupation a falling off from his boasted high intentions, and utters a growling sort of merriment at the failure. This is in the tone of the biographer's usual insults on the great bard: he is on these occasions coarse, pompous, and unjust. Milton did not come home to take a part by the sword, but by the pen: if therefore he endeavoured to aid an incompetent income by taking pupils, what inconsistency was there in this? The sneer comes doubly ill from one who had been himself a schoolmaster.

It seems that Milton endeavoured to teach his scholars a wider range of knowledge than the Doctor thought practicable; whereupon follows that famous passage of Johnson, which has been so often cited, and which is so excellent, that I must repeat it again :—

“The purpose of Milton,” he begins, “was to teach something more solid than the common literature of schools, by reading those authors that treat of physical subjects, such as the Georgic and astronomical treatises of the ancients. This was a scheme of improvement which seems to have busied many literary projectors of that age. Cowley, who had more means than Milton of knowing what was wanting to the embellishments of life, formed the same plan of education in his imaginary college.

“But the truth is, that the knowledge of external nature, and the sciences which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation; whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong: the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truth, and prove by events the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and justice are virtues and excellences of all times and all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance. Our intercourse with intellectual nature is neces-

sary ; our speculations upon matter are voluntary and at leisure. Physiological learning is of such rare emergence, that one may know another half his life without being able to estimate his skill in hydrostatics or astronomy ; but his moral and prudential character immediately appears.

“ Those authors, therefore, are to be read at schools that supply most axioms of prudence, most principles of moral truth, and most materials for conversation ; and these purposes are best served by poets, orators, and historians.

“ Let me not be censured for this digression as pedantic or paradoxical ; for, if I have Milton against me, I have Socrates on my side. It was his labour to turn philosophy from the study of nature to speculations upon life ; but the innovators whom I oppose are turning off attention from life to nature. They seem to think that we are placed here to watch the growth of plants, or the motions of the stars : Socrates was rather of opinion that what we had to learn was, how to do good and avoid evil.

*“Ὅττι τοι ἐν μεγάροισι κακόντ’ ἀγαθόντε τέτυκται.”*

Had Johnson always written so, what a beautiful and perfect work he would have made !

But now Milton’s evil days began : he entered into thorny controversies which blind the imagination, and harden and embitter the heart. It was not for sublime talents, like his, to entangle themselves in these webs : his mighty genius could not move under the oppressive weight of so

much abstruse, and, I will add, useless, though multifarious and astonishing, learning. But I am bound to notice what has been stated on the other side. Fletcher, in the 'Introductory Review of Milton's Prose Works,' says, "Let us never think of John Milton as a poet, merely: however in that capacity he may have adorned our language, and benefited, by ennobling, his species. He was a citizen also, with whom patriotism was as heroical a passion, prompting him to do his country service, as was that 'inward prompting' of poesy, by which he did his country honour. He was alive to all that was due from man to man in all the relations of life: he was invested with a power to mould the mind of a nation, and to lead the people into 'the glorious ways of truth and prosperous virtue.' The poet has long eclipsed the man: he has been imprisoned even in the temple of the Muses; and the very splendor of the bard seems to be our title to pass 'an act of oblivion' on the share he bore in the events and discussions of the momentous times in which he lived. Ought not, rather, his wide renown in this capacity to lead us to the contemplation and study of the whole of his character and his works? Sworn by a father, who knew what persecution was, at the first altar of freedom erected in this land, he, a student of the finest temperament, bent on grasping all sciences, and professing none, and burning with intense ambition for distinction, forsook his harp, and 'the quiet and still air of delightful studies,' and devoted the

energies of earliest and maturest manhood, to be aiding in the grandest crisis of the first of human causes: and he became the most conspicuous literary actor in the dreadful yet glorious drama of the grand rebellion. He beheld tyranny and intolerance trampling upon the most sacred prerogatives of God and man; and he was compelled by the nobility of his nature, by the obligations of virtue, by the loud summons of beleaguered truth; in short, by his patriotism as well as his piety, to lay down the lyre, whose earliest tones are yet so fascinating; to ‘doff his garland and singing robes,’ and to adventure within the circle of peril and glory; and buckling on the controversial panoply, he threw it off only when the various works of this volume, surpassed by none in any sort of eloquence, became the record and trophy of his achievements, and the worthy forerunners of those poems, which a whole people ‘will not willingly let die.’”

The summit of fame is occupied by the poet, but the base of the vast elevation may justly be said to rest on these prose works; and we invite his admirers to descend from the former, and survey the region that lies round about the latter;—a less explored, but not less magnificent domain.

Fletcher has (p. vii.) inserted the following extract. In the ‘Second Defence of the People of England,’ Milton is led in self-defence, he says, “to rescue his life from that species of obscurity which is the associate of unprincipled depravity.”



He then commences in this strain his too brief autobiography :—

“This it will be necessary for me to do on more accounts than one : first, that so many good and learned men among the neighbouring nations, who read my works, may not be induced by this fellow’s calumnies to alter the favourable opinion which they have formed of me, but may be persuaded that I am not one who ever disgraced beauty of sentiment by deformity of conduct, or the maxims of a freeman by the actions of a slave ; and that the whole tenour of my life has, by the grace of God, hitherto been unsullied by any enormity or crime : next, that those illustrious worthies, who are the objects of my praise, may know that nothing could afflict me with more shame than to have any vices of mine diminish the force or lessen the value of my panegyric upon them ; and, lastly, that the people of England, whom fate, or duty, or their own virtues, have incited me to defend, may be convinced from the purity and integrity of my life, that my defence, if it do not redound to their honour, can never be considered as their disgrace.

“I will now mention who and whence I am. I was born at London, of an honest family : my father was distinguished by the undeviating integrity of his life ; my mother, by the esteem in which she was held, and the alms which she bestowed. My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature ; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that from twelve years of age I hardly ever left my studies, or went to

bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight: my eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches; which, however, could not chill the ardour of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my improvement. My father had me daily instructed in the grammar school, and by other masters at home: he then, after I had acquired a proficiency in various languages, and had made a considerable progress in philosophy, sent me to the university of Cambridge. Here I passed seven years in the usual course of instruction and study, with the approbation of the good, and without any stain upon my character, till I took the degree of Master of Arts.

“ After this I did not, as this miscreant feigns, run away into Italy, but of my own accord retired to my father’s house, whither I was accompanied by the regrets of most of the fellows of the college, who showed me no common marks of friendship and esteem. On my father’s estate, where he had determined to pass the remainder of his days, I enjoyed an interval of uninterrupted leisure, which I devoted entirely to the perusal of the Greek and Latin classics; though I occasionally visited the metropolis, either for the sake of purchasing books, or of learning something new in mathematics or in music, in which I, at that time, found a source of pleasure and amusement. In this manner I spent five years, till my mother’s death: I then became anxious to visit foreign parts, and particularly Italy. My father gave me his permission, and I left home with one

servant. On my departure, the celebrated Henry Wotton, who had long been King James's ambassador at Venice, gave me a signal proof of his regard, in an elegant letter which he wrote, breathing not only the warmest friendship, but containing some maxims of conduct which I found very useful in my travels. The noble Thomas Scudamore, King Charles's ambassador, to whom I carried letters of recommendation, received me most courteously at Paris. His lordship gave me a card of introduction to the learned Hugo Grotius, at that time ambassador from the Queen of Sweden to the French court; whose acquaintance I anxiously desired, and to whose house I was accompanied by some of his lordship's friends. A few days after, when I set out for Italy, he gave me letters to the English merchants on my route, that they might show me any civilities in their power.

“Taking ship at Nice, I arrived at Genoa; and afterwards visited Leghorn, Pisa, and Florence. In the latter city, which I have always more particularly esteemed for the elegance of its dialect, its genius, and its taste, I stopped about two months; when I contracted an intimacy with many persons of rank and learning, and was a constant attendant at their literary parties; a practice which prevails there, and tends so much to the diffusion of knowledge and the preservation of friendship.

“No time will ever abolish the agreeable recollections which I cherish of Jacob Gaddi, Carolo

Dati, Frescobaldo, Cultellero, Bonomatthai, Clementillo, Francisco, and many others.

“From Florence I went to Sienna, thence to Rome; where, after I had spent about two months in viewing the antiquities of that renowned city, where I experienced the most friendly attentions from Lucas Holstein, and other learned and ingenious men, I continued my route to Naples; there I was introduced by a certain recluse, with whom I had travelled from Rome, to John Baptist Manso, marquis of Villa, a nobleman of distinguished rank and authority, to whom Torquato Tasso, the illustrious poet, inscribed his book on ‘Friendship.’ During my stay, he gave me singular proofs of his regard; he himself conducted me round the city, and to the palace of the viceroy; and more than once paid me a visit at my lodgings. On my departure he gravely apologized for not having shown me more civility, which he said he had been restrained from doing, because I had spoken with so little reserve on matters of religion.

“When I was preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece, the melancholy intelligence which I received of the civil commotions in England made me alter my purpose; for I thought it base to be travelling for amusement abroad, while my fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home.

“While I was on my way back to Rome, some merchants informed me that the English jesuits had formed a plot against me if I returned to Rome, because I had spoken too freely of reli-

gion: for it was a rule which I laid down to myself in those places, never to be the first to begin any conversation on religion; but, if any questions were put to me concerning my faith, to declare it without any reserve or fear. I nevertheless returned to Rome. I took no steps to conceal either my person or my character; and for about the space of two months, I again openly defended, as I had done before, the reformed religion in the very metropolis of popery.

“By the favour of God, I got back to Florence, where I was received with as much affection as if I had returned to my native country. There I stopped as many months as I had done before, except that I made an excursion of a few days to Lucca; and crossing the Apennines, passed through Bologna and Ferrara to Venice.

“After I had spent a month in surveying the curiosities of this city, and had put on board a ship the books which I had collected in Italy, I proceeded through Verona and Milan, and along the Leman lake to Geneva.

“The mention of this city brings to my recollection the slandering More,\* and makes me again call the Deity to witness, that in all those places, in which vice meets with so little discouragement, and is practised with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue; and perpetually reflected that, though my conduct might escape the notice of men, it would not elude the inspection of God.

\* Alexander More.

“ At Geneva I held daily conferences with John Diodati, the learned professor of theology.

“ Then, pursuing my former route through France, I returned to my native country, after an absence of one year and about three months, at the time when Charles, having broken the peace, was renewing what is called the episcopal war with the Scots ; in which the royalists being routed in the first encounter, and the English being universally and justly disaffected, the necessity of his affairs at last obliged him to convene a parliament.

“ As soon as I was able, I hired a spacious house in the city for myself and my books ; where I again with rapture renewed my literary pursuits, and where I calmly awaited the issue of the contest, which I trusted to the wise conduct of Providence and to the courage of the people.

“ The vigour of the parliament had begun to humble the pride of the bishops. As long as the liberty of speech was no longer subject to control, all mouths began to be opened against the bishops ; some complained of the vices of the individuals ; others of those of the order. They said that it was unjust that they alone should differ from the model of other reformed churches, and particularly the word of God.

“ This awakened all my attention and my zeal : I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty ; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and superstition ; that the principles of

religion, which were the first objects of our care, would exert a salutary influence on the manners and constitution of the republic; and as I had from my youth studied the distinctions between religious and civil rights, I perceived that, if I ever wished to be of use, I ought at least not to be wanting to my country, to the church, and to so many of my fellow Christians, in a crisis of so much danger. I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object. I accordingly wrote two books to a friend, concerning ‘The Reformation of the Church of England.’”

Here we have Milton’s own account of his own early life, of which we cannot doubt the accuracy.

This treatise ends in the form of a prayer, “piously laying the sad condition of England before the footstool of The Almighty,” than which there is not a more sublime patriotic Ode in any language. Thus:

“Thou therefore that sittest in light and glory unapproachable; Parent of angels and men! next, thee I implore, Omnipotent King, Redeemer of that last remnant, whose nature thou didst assume, ineffable and everlasting love! And thou, the third subsistence of divine infinitude, illumining Spirit, the joy and solace of created things, and Tripersonal Godhead! look upon this thy poor and almost spent and expiring church: leave her not thus a prey to these im-

portunate wolves, that wait, and think it long, till they devour thy tender flock ; those wild boars that have broken into thy vineyard, and left the print of their polluting hoofs on the souls of thy servants. O, let them not bring about their damning designs, that stand now at the entrance of the bottomless pit, expecting the watch-word to open and let out those dreadful locusts and scorpions, to re-involve us in that pitchy cloud of infernal darkness, where we shall never more see the sun of thy truth again ; never hope for the cheerful dawn ; never more hear the bird of morning sing. Be moved with pity at the afflicted state of this our shaken monarchy, that now lies labouring under her throes, and struggling against the grudges of more dreadful calamities.

“ O thou, that after the impetuous rage of five bloody inundations and the succeeding sword of intestine war, soaking the land in her own gore, didst pity the sad and ceaseless revolution of our swift and thick-coming sorrows ; when we were quite breathless, of thy free grace didst motion peace and terms of covenant to us ; and, having first well nigh freed us from anti-christian thralldom, didst build up this Britannic empire to a glorious and enviable height, with all her daughter-islands about her ; stay us in this felicity : let not the obstinacy of our half-obedience and will-worship bring forth that viper of sedition, that, for these fourscore years, has been breeding to eat through the entrails of our peace ; but let her cast her abortive spawn without the danger of this



travailing and throbbing kingdom, that we may still remember in our solemn thanksgivings, how for us the northern ocean, even to the frozen Thule, was scattered with the proud shipwrecks of the Spanish armada ; and the very maw of hell ransacked, and made to give up her concealed destination, ere she could vent it in that horrible and damned blast.

“ O, how much more glorious will those former deliverances appear, when we shall know them not only to have saved us from greater miseries past, but have reserved us for greater happiness to come ! Hitherto thou hast but freed us, and that not fully, from the unjust and tyrannous claim of thy foes ; now, unite us entirely, and appropriate us to thyself ; tie us everlastingly in willing homage to the prerogative of thy eternal throne.

“ And now we know, O thou our most certain hope and defence, that thine enemies have been consulting all the sorceries of the great whore, and have joined their plots with that sad intelligencing tyrant that mischiefs the world with his mines of Ophir, and lies thirsting to revenge his naval ruins that have larded our seas : but let them all take counsel together, and let it come to nought ; let them decree, and do thou cancel it ; let them gather themselves, and be scattered ; let them embattel themselves, and be broken ; let them embattel, and be broken, for thou art with us !

“ Then, amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of

saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains, in new and lofty measures, to sing and celebrate thy divine mercies and marvellous judgments in this land throughout all ages, whereby this great and warlike nation, instructed and inured to the fervent and continual practice of truth and righteousness, and casting far from her the rags of her old vices, may press on hard to that high and happy emulation to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people at that day, when thou, the eternal and shortly-expected King, shalt open the clouds to judge the several kingdoms of this world; and distributing national honours and rewards to religious and just commonwealths, shalt put an end to all earthly tyrannies, proclaiming thy universal and mild monarchy through heaven and earth; where they, undoubtedly, that, by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive, above the inferior orders of the blessed, the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones, into their glorious titles; and in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the doubtless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss, in overmeasure for ever."

It would be quite impossible to give an adequate account of Milton's life and character, were I to omit here to insert the whole of the Preface to the second book of his 'Reason of Church Government urged against Prelates,' of which

parts only have been hitherto extracted by former biographers :—

“ How happy were it for this frail, and, as it may be called, mortal life of man, since all earthly things which have the name of good and convenient in our daily use, are withal so cumbersome and full of trouble, if knowledge, yet which is the best and lightest possession of the mind, were, as the common saying is, no burden ; and that what it wanted of being a load to any part of the body, it did not with a heavy advantage overlay upon the spirit.

“ For, not to speak of that knowledge that rests in the contemplation of natural causes and dimensions, which must needs be a lower wisdom as the object is low, certain it is, that he who hath obtained in more than the scantiest measure to know any thing distinctly of God, and of his true worship, and what is infallibly good and happy in the state of man’s life ; what in itself evil and miserable, though vulgarly not so esteemed ; he, that hath obtained to know this, the only high valuable wisdom indeed, remembering also that God, even to a strictness, requires the improvement of these his entrusted gifts, cannot but sustain a sorer burden of mind, and more pressing than any supportable toil or weight which the body can labour under ; how and in what manner he shall dispose and employ those sums of knowledge and illumination, which God hath sent him into this world to trade with.

“ And that which aggravates the burden more

is, that, having received amongst his allotted parcels, certain precious truths, of such an orient lustre as no diamond can equal, which nevertheless he has in charge to put off at any cheap rate, yea, for nothing, to them that will; the great merchants of this world, fearing that this course would soon discover and disgrace the false glitter of their deceitful wares, wherewith they abuse the people, like poor Indians, with beads and glasses, practise by all means how they may suppress the vending of such rarities, and at such a cheapness as would undo them, and turn their trash upon their hands.

“Therefore, by gratifying the corrupt desires of men in fleshly doctrines, they stir them up to persecute with hatred and contempt all those that seek to bear themselves uprightly in this their spiritual factory; which, they foreseeing, though they cannot but testify of truth and the excellency of that heavenly traffic which they bring, against what opposition or danger soever, yet needs it must sit heavily upon their spirits, that, being in God’s prime intention, and their own, selected heralds of peace and dispensers of treasure inestimable, without price to them that have no peace; they find in the discharge of their commission, that they are made the greatest variance and offence, a very sword and fire, both in house and city, over the whole earth.

“This is that which the sad prophet Jeremiah laments:—‘Wo is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife and contention!’ And,

although divine inspiration must certainly have been sweet to those ancient prophets, yet the irksomeness of that truth which they brought was so unpleasant unto them, that every where they call it a burden. Yea, that mysterious Book of Revelation which the great evangelist was bid to eat, as it had been some eye-brightening electuary of knowledge and foresight, though it were 'sweet in his mouth,' and in the learning, 'it was bitter in his belly,' bitter in the denouncing.

"Nor was this hid from the wise poet Sophocles, who, in that place of his tragedy where Tiresias is called to resolve king Œdipus in a matter which he knew would be grievous, brings him in bemoaning his lot, that he knew more than other men.

"For surely to every good and peaceable man, it must in nature needs be a hateful thing to be the displeaser and molester of thousands; much better would it like him doubtless to be the messenger of gladness and contentment, which is his chief intended business to all mankind, but that they resist and oppose their own happiness.

"But when God commands to take the trumpet, and blow a dolorous or jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal. If he shall think to be silent as Jeremiah did, because of the reproach and derision he met with daily, 'and all his familiar friends watched for his halting,' to be revenged on him for speaking the truth, he would be forced to confess as he confessed; 'his word was in my heart as a burn-

ing fire shut up in my bones; I was weary with forbearing, and could not stay.'

"Which might teach these times not suddenly to condemn all things that are sharply spoken or vehemently written as proceeding out of stomach virulence and ill-nature; but to consider rather, that if the prelates have leave to say the worst that can be said, or do the worst that can be done, while they strive to keep to themselves, to their great pleasure and commodity, those things which they ought to render up, no man can be justly offended with him that shall endeavour to impart and bestow, without any gain to himself, those sharp and saving words, which would be a terror and a torment in him to keep back.

"For me, I have endeavoured to lay up as the best treasure and solace of a good old age, if God vouchsafe it me, the honest liberty of free speech from my youth, where I shall think it available in so dear a concernment as the church's good. For, if I be, whether by disposition, or what other cause, too inquisitive, or suspicious of myself and mine own doings, who can help it?

"But this I foresee, that should the church be brought under heavy oppression, and God have given me ability the while to reason against that man that should be the author of so foul a deed; or should she, by blessing from above on the industry and courage of faithful men, change this her distracted estate into better days, without the least furtherance or contribution of those few talents, which God at that present had lent me;

I foresee what stories I should hear within myself; all my life after, of discourage and reproach. Timorous and ungrateful, the church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies, and thou bewailest;—what matters it for thee, or thy bewailing? When time was, thou couldst not find a syllable of all that thou hast read or studied, to utter in her behalf: yet ease and leisure was given thee for thy retired thoughts, out of the sweat of other men. Thou hast the diligence, the parts, the language of a man, if a vain subject were to be adorned or beautified; but when the cause of God and his church was to be pleaded, for which purpose that tongue was given thee which thou hast, God listened if he could hear thy voice among his zealous servants, but thou wert dumb as a beast: from henceforward be that which thine own brutish silence hath made thee!

“Or else I should have heard on the other ear,—Slothful, and ever to be set light by, the church hath now overcome her late distresses after the unwearied labours of many her true servants that stood up in her defence; thou also wouldst take upon thee to share amongst them of their joy: but wherefore thou? Where canst thou show any word or deed of thine, which might have hastened her peace? Whatever thou dost now talk, or write, or look, is the alms of other men’s active prudence and zeal. Dare not now to say or do any thing better than thy former sloth and infamy; or, if thou darest, thou dost impudently to make a thrifty purchase of boldness to thyself, out of the

painful merits of other men. What before was thy sin, is now thy duty, to be abject and worthless.

“These, and such-like lessons as these, I know would have been my matins duly, and my even-song: but now by this little diligence mark what a privilege I have gained with good men and saints, to claim my right of lamenting the tribulations of the church, if she should suffer, when others, that have ventured nothing for her sake, have not the honour to be admitted mourners: but, if she lift up her drooping head and prosper, among those that have something more than wished her welfare, I have my charter and freehold of rejoicing to me and my King.

“Concerning therefore this wayward subject against prelates, the touching wherefore is so distasteful and disquietous to a number of men; as by what hath been said I may deserve of charitable readers to be credited, that neither envy nor gall hath entered me upon this controversy, but the enforcement of conscience only, and a preventive fear lest this duty should be against me, when I would store up to myself the good provision of peaceful hours; so, lest it should be still imputed to me, as I have found it hath been, that some self-pleasing humours of vain-glory hath incited me to contest with men of high estimation, now while green years are upon my head; from this needless surmised I shall hope to dissuade the intelligent and equal auditor, if I can but say successfully that which in this exigent behoves me;



although I would be heard only, if it might be, by the elegant and learned reader, to whom principally for a while I shall beg leave I may address myself.

“To him it will be no new thing, though I tell him that if I hunted after praise, by the estimation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies, although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand; or were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit any thing elaborately composed to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times.

“Next, if I were wise only to my own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of itself might catch applause, (whereas this hath all the disadvantages on the contrary,) and such a subject as the publishing whereof might be delayed at pleasure, and time enough to pencil it over with all the curious touches of art, even to the perfection of a faultless picture; whereas in this argument the not deferring is of great moment to the good speeding, that, if solidity have leisure to do her office, art cannot have much.

“Lastly, I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand: and though I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet, since it will be such a folly as wisest men go about to commit, having

only confessed and so committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly, to have courteous pardon: for, although a poet soaring in the high reason of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him, might, without apology, speak more of himself than I mean to do; yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortal thing among many readers of no empyreal conceit, to venture and indulge unusual things of myself, I shall petition to the gentler sort, it may not be envy to me.

“I must say, therefore, that after I had for my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father (whom God recompense), been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers at home and at the school, it was found, that whether ought was imposed me by them that had the overlooking, or betaken to of my own choice in English, or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.

“But much latelier in the private academies of Italy, whither I was favoured to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, (for the manner is, that every one must give some proof of his wit and reading there,) met with acceptance above what was looked for; and other things, which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to pack up amongst them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian

is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting, which now grew daily upon me, that with labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.

“ These thoughts at once possessed me; and these other, that if I were certain to write as men buy leases, for three lives and downward, there ought no regard be sooner had, than to God’s glory, by the honour and instruction of my country.

“ For which cause, and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second rank among the Latins, I applied myself to that resolution which Ariosto followed against the persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end (that were a toilsome vanity), but to be an interpreter and relater of the best and sagest things, among mine own citizens throughout this island in the mother dialect: that, what the greatest and choicest wits of Athens, Rome, or modern Italy, and those Hebrews of old, did for their country, I, in my proportion, with this over and above, of being a Christian, might do for mine; not caring to be once named abroad, though perhaps I could attain to that; but content with these British islands as

my world; whose fortune hath hitherto been, that, if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskilful handling of monks and mechanics.

“Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home, in the spacious circuits of her musing, hath liberty to propose to herself, though of highest hope and hardest attempting; whether that epic form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso, are a diffuse, and the Book of Job a brief model;—or whether the rules of Aristotle herein are strictly to be kept, or nature to be followed, which in them that show art, and use judgment, is no transgression, but an enriching of art: or, lastly, what king, or knight, before the Conquest, might be chosen in whom to lay the pattern of a Christian hero.

“And, as Tasso gave to a prince of Italy his choice, whether he would command him to write of Godfrey’s expedition against the infidels, or Belisarius against the Goths, or Charlemagne against the Lombards; if to the instinct of nature and emboldening of art aught may be trusted, and there be nothing adverse in our climate or the fate of this age, it haply would be no rashness, from an equal diligence and inclination, to present the like offer in our own ancient stories; or whether those dramatic compositions, wherein

Sophocles and Euripides reign, shall be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a nation.

“The Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral drama in the ‘Song of Solomon,’ consisting of two persons, and a double chorus, as Origen rightly judges : and the ‘Apocalypse’ of St. John is the majestic image of a high and stately tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn scenes and acts with a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies ; and this, my opinion, the grave authority of Paræus, commenting that book, is sufficient to confirm.

“Or, if occasion shall lead to imitate those magnificent odes and hymns, wherein Pindarus and Callimachus are, in most things, worthy ; some others in their frame judicious, in their matter most an end faulty.

“But those frequent songs throughout the law and prophets, beyond all these, not in their divine arguments alone, but in the very critical art of composition, may be easily made appear over all kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable.

“These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some, though most abused, in every nation ; and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility ; to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in right tune ; to celebrate in glorious and lofty hymns the throne and equipage of God’s almightiness, and what he works, and what he

suffers to be wrought with high providence in his church ; to sing victorious agonies of martyrs and saints, the deeds and triumphs of just and pious nations, doing valiantly through faith against the enemies of Christ ; to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship.

“ Lastly, whatsoever in religion is holy and sublime ; in virtue amiable or grave ; whatsoever hath passion or admiration in all the changes of that which is called fortune from without, or the wily subtleties and reflexes of man's thoughts from within ; all these things with a solid and treatable smoothness to paint out and describe : tracking over the whole book of sanctity and virtue, through all the instances of example, with such delight to those especially of soft and delicious temper, who will not so much as look upon truth herself, unless they see her elegantly dressed ; that, whereas the paths of honesty and good life appear now rugged and difficult, though they be indeed easy and pleasant, they will then appear to all men both easy and pleasant, though they were rugged and difficult indeed.

“ And what a benefit this would be to our youth and gentry, may be soon guessed by what we know of the corruption and bane, which they suck in daily from the writings and interludes of libidinous and ignorant poetasters, who having scarce ever heard of that which is the main consistence of a true poem, the choice of such persons as they ought to introduce, and what is moral and

decent to each one; do for the most part lay up vicious principles in sweet pills to be swallowed down, and make the taste of virtuous documents harsh and sour.

“ But, because the spirit of man cannot demean itself lively in this body without some recreating intermission of labour and serious things, it were happy for the commonwealth, if our magistrates, as in those famous governments of old, would take into their case, not only the deciding of our contentious law cases and brawls, but the managing of our public sports and festival pastimes; that they might be, not such as were authorised a while since, the provocations of drunkenness and lust, but such as may inure and harden our bodies by martial exercises to all warlike skill and performance; and may civilise, adorn, and make discreet our minds, by the learned and affable meeting of frequent academies, and the procurement of wise and artful recitations, sweetened with eloquent and graceful inticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance, and fortitude, instructing and bettering the nation at all opportunities, that the call of wisdom and virtue may be heard every where, as Solomon saith, ‘ she crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets, on the top of high places, in the chief concourse, and in the openings of the gates.’

“ Whether this may not be, not only in pulpits, but after another persuasive method at set and solemn panegyries, in theatres, porches, or what

other place or way may win most upon the people, to receive at once both recreation and instruction, let them in authority consult.

“ The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself any thing worth to my country, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath plucked from me, by an abortive and fore-dated discovery : and the accomplishment of these lies not but in a power above man’s to promise ; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend ; and that the land had once enfranchised herself from this impertinent yoke of prelates, under whose inquisitorious and tyrannical duncery no free and splendid wit can flourish.

“ Neither do I think it shame to covenant with my knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted ; as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine, like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite ; nor to be obtained from the invocation of dame Memory and her syren daughters ; but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases.



“ To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs ; till which in some measure be compassed, at my own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them.

“ Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand, but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies, to come into the dim reflection of hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk, and there be fain to club quotations with men whose learning and belief lies in marginal stuffings, who, when they have, like good sumpters, laid ye down their horse-loads of citations and fathers at your door, with a rhapsody of who and who were bishops here or there, ye may take off their pack-saddles, their day's work is done, and episcopacy, as they think, stoutly vindicated. Let any gentle apprehension, that can distinguish learned pains from unlearned drudgery, imagine what pleasure or profoundness can be in this, or what honour to deal against such adversaries.

“ But were it the meanest under-service, if God

by his secretary conscience enjoin it, it were sad for me if I should draw back; for me especially now when all men offer their aid to help, ease, and lighten the difficult labours of the church, to whose service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and in my own resolutions; till coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, and take an oath withal, which, unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure himself, or split his faith; I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the learned office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing.

“However thus church-outed by the prelates, hence may appear the right I have to meddle in these matters, as before the necessity and constraint appeared.”

## CHAPTER X.

## OF MILTON'S MARRIAGE.

MILTON was now thirty-four years old, when he seems to have taken upon himself suddenly the resolution to marry: his choice fell on Mary, daughter of Richard Powell, Esq., of Forest Hill, near Shotover, in Oxfordshire, an active royalist, who lived gaily and expensively. The match was ill suited, and did not turn out happily. He was caught by the lady's beauty, but found neither her mind nor her disposition accordant: she was soon tired of his studious habits and quiet unvisited house, after the company to which she had been accustomed at her father's mansion. In a few weeks she requested permission to revisit her father, where she stayed, in defiance of his remonstrance, the whole summer: she would not even answer his letters. This so provoked him, that he resolved to divorce her; and to justify his resolution, published, in 1644, his 'Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, restored to the good of both sexes.' "He declares," says Fletcher, "his object to be to prove, first, that other reasons of divorce besides adultery were, by

the law of Moses, and are yet to be, allowed by the Christian magistrate, as a piece of justice, and that the words of Christ are not hereby contraried: next, that to prohibit absolutely any divorce whatever, except those which Moses excepted, is against the reason of law. The grand position is this:—that indisposition, unfitness, or contrariety of mind, arising from a cause in nature, unchangeable, hindering, and ever likely to hinder, the main benefits of conjugal society, which are solace and peace, is a greater reason of divorce than adultery, provided there be a mutual consent for separation.”

He next published the ‘Tetrachordon, or Exposition of the four chief places in Scripture which treat of Nullities in Marriage’ Thirdly, ‘The Judgment of the famous Martin Bucer touching Divorce.’ Fourthly, ‘Colasterion,’ a reply to a nameless answer to his first work.

These tracts raised a great clamour against the author. It seems to me probable, that the lady married Milton against her will, at the instigation of her parents. Todd has discovered documents, which show that an acquaintance had subsisted between Powell and Milton’s father, a native of Oxfordshire, and that Powell had borrowed money of him, which was not paid at the former’s death. Powell was a distressed and ruined man, expensive and reckless: it is probable, therefore, that he may have sacrificed his daughter, who soon was willing to escape from one not suited to her habits of life.

This conjecture is in concurrence with some ingenious surmises of Mitford, founded on certain passages which he has extracted from Milton's tracts. Mrs. Milton seems to have been a dull, unintellectual, insensate woman, though possessed of outward personal beauty.

She was alarmed at last, when she found Milton in earnest to take another wife, and contrived an interview, at which she begged his pardon, and was restored to her home, where she died in a few years: but I doubt, from certain passages in Milton's poetry, if he did not think that he had yielded to her tears with too much softness.

The whole of the documents relative to Milton's claim on Powell's property, which are set forth at length by Todd, who recovered them from the public archives, are very curious. It appears that it was as early as 1627, when Milton was a student at Cambridge, that his father advanced 500*l.* to Powell on mortgage, to his son's use. I take this to have been a settlement made as a provision for the poet.

When Powell died, loaded with debt, in Jan. 1646-7, Milton took possession of the mortgaged property, and the widow, with eight children, was left penniless: she claimed her thirds for dower, but could not obtain them.

Upon Mrs. Powell's petition, 19th April, 1651, the following notes are made:—

“By the law Mrs. Powell might recover her thirds, without doubt; but she is so extremely poor, she hath not wherewithal to prosecute; and

besides, Mr. Milton is a harsh and choleric man, and married Mr. Powell's daughter, who would be undone if any such course were taken against him by Mrs. Powell; he having turned away his wife heretofore for a long space, upon some other occasion."

The date of the death of this first wife of Milton is said to have been 1653. His father died in 1647, in the poet's house, who had also received under his hospitable roof the ruined family of Powell, till their father died; but he seems to have been upon no terms with the widow.

## CHAPTER XI.

## HIS VARIOUS LITERARY OCCUPATIONS.

IN 1645 the collection of Milton's early poems was published by Humphrey Moseley, the fashionable publisher of poetry of that age.

In 1641 came out 'Animadversions upon the Remonstrants' Defence against Smectymnuus.'

Next year, 'An Apology for Smectymnuus,' in reply to Bishop Hall's or his son's 'Modest Confutation against a scandalous and seditious Libel.' This is Milton's last work on the puritan side of the controversy.

In 1644 he published his 'Tractate of Education: to Master Samuel Hartlib.'

The month of November of this year produced the 'Areopagitica: a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing. To the Parliament of England.' Mitford pronounces this to be the finest production in prose from Milton's pen. "For vigour and eloquence of style, unconquerable force of argument, majesty, and richness of language, it is not to be surpassed."

In 1648-9 he published 'The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates: proving that it is lawful, and hath been held so through all ages, for any, who have the power, to call to account a tyrant or wicked king, and after due conviction, to depose and put him to death, if the ordinary magistrate have neglected or denied to do it; and that they, who of late so much blame deposing, are the men that did it themselves.'

This tract was a defence of the execution of King Charles, against the objections of the Presbyterians.

The very title of this treatise is surely in the highest degree objectionable, and does not in these days require any refutation. To say the truth, this is a part of Milton's character which puzzles me—and no other. This bloodthirstiness does not agree with his sanctity, and other mental and moral qualities. I will not say that kings may not be deposed: but Charles I. ought not to have been deposed, much less put to death. In the poet, however, posterity has forgotten the regicide.

In 1648-9 came out his 'Observations on the Articles of Peace between James Earl of Ormond for King Charles the First on the one hand, and the Irish Rebels and Papists on the other hand: and on a letter sent by Ormond to Colonel Jones, Governor of Dublin: and a Representation of the Scots Presbytery at Belfast in Ireland,' &c.

"Such," says Milton, "were the fruits of my private studies, which I gratuitously presented to



the church and to the state, and for which I was recompensed by nothing but impunity, though the actions themselves procured me peace of conscience and the approbation of the good; while I exercised that freedom of discussion, which I loved. Others, without labour or desert, got the possession of honours and emoluments; but no one ever knew me, either soliciting any thing myself, or through the medium of my friends; ever beheld me in a supplicating posture at the doors of the senate or the levees of the great. I usually kept myself secluded at home, where my own property, part of which had been withheld during the civil commotions, and part of which had been absorbed in the oppressive contributions which I had to sustain, afforded me a scanty subsistence. When I was released from these engagements, and thought that I was about to enjoy an interval of uninterrupted ease, I turned my thoughts to a history of my country, from the earliest times to the present period."

In 1649, Milton says, "I had already finished four books of the history, when after the subversion of the monarchy, and the establishment of a republic, I was surprised by an invitation from the council of state, who desired my services in the office of foreign affairs. A book appeared soon after, which was ascribed to the king, and contained the most insidious charges against the Parliament. I was ordered to answer it, and opposed the Iconoclast to the Icon."

The title is 'ΕΙΚΟΝΟΚΛΑΣΤΗΣ: in answer to a

book entitled ΕΙΚΩΝ ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ, the portraiture of his majesty in his solitudes and sufferings.'

A question has been raised, and fiercely battled of late, as to the genuineness of the 'Icon Basilike.' The circumstantial evidence seems strong that it was composed by Bishop Gauden.\*

Besides that every reader must be curious about this exordium, it would be doing great injustice to Milton's prose works to omit the following extract from the preface to this extraordinary production:

"To descant on the misfortunes of a person fallen from so high a dignity, who hath also paid his final debt both to nature and his faults, is neither of itself a thing commendable, nor the intention of this discourse. Neither was it fond ambition, nor the vanity to get a name, present or with posterity, by writing against a king. I never was so thirsty after fame, nor so destitute of other hopes and means, better and more certain to attain it: for kings have gained glorious titles from their favourers by writing against private men, as Henry VIII. did against Luther; but no man ever gained much honour by writing against a king, as not usually meeting with that force of argument in such courtly antagonists, which to convince might add to his reputation. Kings most commonly, though strong in legions, are but weak in arguments; as they who ever have accustomed from the cradle to use their will only as their right hand, their reason always as their left. Whence unexpectedly constrained to that kind of

\* See Todd's Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 1825.

combat, they prove but weak and puny adversaries : nevertheless, for their sakes, who through custom, simplicity, or want of better teaching, have no more seriously considered kings, than in the gaudy name of majesty, and admire them and their doings as if they breathed not the same breath with other mortal men, I shall make no scruple to take up (for it seems to be the challenge both of him and all his party) to take up this gauntlet, though a king's, in the behalf of liberty and the commonwealth.

“ First, then, that some men (whether this were by him intended, or by his friends) have by policy accomplished after death that revenge upon their enemies, which in life they were not able, hath been oft related : and among other examples we find, that the last will of Cæsar being read to the people, and what bounteous legacies he had bequeathed them, wrought more in that vulgar audience to the avenging of his death, than all the art he could ever use to win their favour in his lifetime. And how much their intent, who published these overlate apologies and meditations of the dead king, drives to the same end of stirring up the people to bring him that honour, that affection, and by consequence that revenge to his dead corps, which he himself living could never gain to his person, it appears both by the conceited portraiture before his book, drawn out to the full measure of a masking scene, and set there to catch fools and silly gazers ; and by those Latin words after the end, ‘ *Vota dabunt quæ bella ne-*

garunt;' intimating, that what he could not compass by war, he should achieve by his meditations: for in words which admit of various sense, the liberty is ours, to choose that interpretation, which may best mind us of what our restless enemies endeavour, and what we are timely to prevent. And here may be well observed the loose and negligent curiosity of those, who took upon them to adorn the setting out of this book; for though the picture set in front would martyr him and saint him to befool the people, yet the Latin motto in the end, which they understand not, leaves him, as it were, a politic contriver to bring about that interest, by fair and plausible words, which the force of arms denied him. But quaint emblems and devices, begged from the old pageantry of some twelfth night's entertainment at Whitehall, will do but ill to make a saint or martyr: and if the people resolve to take him sainted at the rate of such a canonizing, I shall suspect their calendar more than the Gregorian. In one thing I must commend his openness, who gave the title to this book, *Εἰκὼν Βασιλική*, that is to say, the King's Image; and by the shrine he dresses out for him, certainly would have the people come and worship him. For which reason this answer also is entitled *Iconoclastes*, the famous surname of many Greek emperors, who in their zeal to the command of God, after long tradition of idolatry in the church, took courage, and broke all superstitious images to pieces. But the people, exorbitant and excessive in all their motions, are prone oftentimes not

to a religious only, but to a civil kind of idolatry, in idolizing their Kings: though never more mistaken in the object of their worship; heretofore being wont to repute for saints those faithful and courageous barons, who lost their lives in the field, making glorious war against tyrants for the common liberty; as Simon de Montford, Earl of Leicester, against Henry III.; Thomas Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster, against Edward II. But now, with a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit, except some few who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of freedom, and have testified it by their matchless deeds, the rest, imbastardized from the ancient nobleness of their ancestors, are ready to fall flat and give adoration to the image and memory of this man, who hath offered at more cunning fetches to undermine our liberties, and put tyranny into an art, than any British king before him: which low dejection and debasement of mind in the people, I must confess, I cannot willingly ascribe to the natural disposition of an Englishman, but rather to two other causes; first, to the prelates and their fellow-teachers, though of another name and sect,\* whose pulpit-stuff, both first and last, hath been the doctrine and perpetual infusion of servility and wretchedness to all their hearers, and whose lives the type of worldliness and hypocrisy, without the least true pattern of virtue, righteousness, or self-denial in their whole practice. I

\* The Presbyterians.

attribute it next to the factious inclination of most men divided from the public by several ends and humours of their own. At first no man less beloved, no man more generally condemned, than was the King; from the time that it became his custom to break parliaments at home, and either wilfully or weakly to betray protestants abroad, to the beginning of these combustions. All men inveighed against him; all men, except court-vassals, opposed him and his tyrannical proceedings; the cry was universal; and this full parliament was at first unanimous in their dislike and protestation against his evil government: but when they, who sought themselves and not the public, began to doubt, that all of them could not by one and the same way attain to their ambitious purposes, then was the King, or his name at least, as a fit property first made use of, his doings made the best of, and by degrees justified; which begot him such a party, as, after many wiles and strugglings with his inward fears, emboldened him at length to set up his standard against the parliament: whenas before that time, all his adherents, consisting most of dissolute swordsmen and suburb-roysters, hardly amounted to the making up of one ragged regiment strong enough to assault the unarmed house of commons. After which attempt, seconded by a tedious and bloody war on his subjects, wherein he hath so far exceeded those his arbitrary violences in time of peace, they who before hated him for his high misgovernment, nay, fought against him with dis-

played banners in the field, now applaud him and extol him for the wisest and most religious Prince that lived. By so strange a method amongst the mad multitude is a sudden reputation won, of wisdom by wilfulness and subtle shifts, of goodness by multiplying evil, of piety by endeavouring to root out true religion.

“But it is evident that the chief of his adherents never loved him, never honoured either him or his cause, but as they took him to set a face upon their own malignant designs; nor bemoan his loss at all, but the loss of their own aspiring hopes: like those captive women, whom the poet notes in his *Iliad*, to have bewailed the death of Patroclus in outward show, but indeed their own condition:—

*Πάτροκλον πρόφασιν, σφῶν δ' αὐτῶν κήδε' ἐκάστη.”*

I do not by this insertion mean that my consent should be implied to Milton's principles and arguments in this extraordinary production, but to exhibit it as a proof of a gigantic mind. The style is hard and Latinised; but after a few pages, when the ear is familiarised to it, it strikes by its extraordinary force, precision, and originality; by the copiousness of its learning, and the unexpected subtlety of its arguments.

Milton now entered into the famous controversy with Salmasius. By the order of the state he wrote ‘*Defensio pro Populo Anglicano contra Claudii Anonymi, alias Salmasii Defensionem Regiam*,’ 1651, afterwards translated into English by Washington. Salmasius (Claude de Saumaise)

had the reputation of one of the greatest scholars of the age. In some respects this dispute was disgraced by the grossest personalities on both sides: many think that Milton destroyed Salmasius's title to classicality: Mitford's opinion is otherwise; and he has discussed the question with much erudition, research, and taste.

This book raised the reputation of Milton upon the continent. He says:\* "I am about to discourse of matters, neither inconsiderable nor common; but how a most potent King, after he had trampled upon the laws of the nation, and given a shock to its religion, and begun to rule at his own will and pleasure, was at last subdued in the field by his own subjects, who had undergone a long slavery under him; how afterwards he was cast into prison; and when he gave no ground, either by words or actions, to hope better things of him, he was finally by the supreme council of the kingdom condemned to die, and beheaded before the very gates of the royal palace. I shall likewise relate (which will much conduce to the easing men's minds of a great superstition) by what right, especially according to our law, this judgment was given, and all these matters transacted; and shall easily defend my valiant and worthy countrymen (who have extremely well deserved of all subjects and nations in the world) from the most wicked calumnies both of domestic and foreign railers, and especially from the reproaches of this most vain and empty sophister,

\* From the translation by Washington.



who sets up for a captain and ringleader to all the rest. For what king's majesty sitting upon an exalted throne, ever shone so brightly, as that of the people of England then did, when shaking off that old superstition, which had prevailed a long time, they gave judgment upon the king himself, or rather upon an enemy who had been their king, caught as it were in a net by his own laws, (who alone of all mortals challenged to himself impunity by a divine right,) and scrupled not to inflict the same punishment upon him, being guilty, which he would have inflicted upon any other? But why do I mention these things as performed by the people, which almost open their voice themselves, and testify the presence of God throughout? who, as often as it seems good to his infinite wisdom, uses to throw down proud and unruly Kings, exalting themselves above the condition of human nature, and utterly to extirpate them and all their family. By his manifest impulse being set on work to recover our almost lost liberty, following him as our guide, and adoring the impresses of his divine power manifested upon all occasions, we went on in no obscure, but an illustrious passage, pointed out and made plain to us by God himself. Which things, if I should so much as hope by any diligence or ability of mine, such as it is, to discourse of as I ought to do, and to commit them so to writing, as that perhaps all nations and all ages may read them, it would be a very vain thing in me: for what style can be august and magnificent enough, what man has

parts sufficient to undertake so great a task? Since we find by experience, that in so many ages as are gone over the world, there has been but here and there a man found, who has been able worthily to recount the actions of great heroes and potent states; can any man have so good an opinion of his own talents, as to think himself capable to reach these glorious and wonderful works of Almighty God, by any language, by any style of his? Which enterprise, though some of the most eminent persons in our commonwealth have prevailed upon me by their authority to undertake, and would have it be my business to vindicate with my pen against envy and calumny (which are proof against arms) those glorious performances of theirs, (whose opinion of me I take as a very great honour, that they should pitch upon me before others to be serviceable in this kind of those most valiant deliverers of my native country; and true it is, that from my very youth I have been bent extremely upon such sort of studies, as inclined me, if not to do great things myself, at least to celebrate those that did,) yet as having no confidence in any such advantages, I have recourse to the divine assistance; and invoke the great and holy God, the giver of all good gifts, that I may as substantially, and as truly, discourse and refute the sauciness and lies of this foreign declamator, as our noble generals piously and successfully by force of arms broke the King's pride and his unruly domineering, and afterwards put an end to both by inflicting a me-

morale punishment upon himself, and as thoroughly as a single person did with ease but of late confute and confound the king himself, rising as it were from the grave, and recommending himself to the people in a book published after his death, with new artifices and allurements of words and expressions. Which antagonist of mine, though he be a foreigner, and, though he deny it a thousand times over, but a poor grammarian; yet not contented with a salary due to him in that capacity, chose to turn a pragmatistical coxcomb, and not only to intrude in state affairs, but into the affairs of a foreign state: though he brings along with him neither modesty, nor understanding, nor any other qualification requisite in so great an arbitrator, but sauciness, and a little grammar only. Indeed, if he had published here, and in English, the same things as he has now wrote in Latin, such as it is, I think no man would have thought it worth while to return an answer to them, but would partly despise them as common, and exploded over and over already; and partly abhor them as sordid and tyrannical maxims, not to be endured even by the most abject of slaves: nay, men that have sided with the King, would have had these thoughts of his book. But since he has swoln it to a considerable bulk, and dispersed it amongst foreigners, who are altogether ignorant of our affairs and constitution, it is fit that they who mistake them should be better informed; and that he, who is so very forward to speak ill of others, should be treated in his own

kind. If it be asked, why we did not then attack him sooner, why we suffered him to triumph so long, and pride himself in our silence? for others I am not to answer; for myself I can boldly say, that I had neither words nor arguments long to seek for the defence of so good a cause, if I had enjoyed such a measure of health as would have endured the fatigue of writing: and being but weak in body, I am forced to write by piecemeal, and break off almost every hour, though the subject be such as requires an unintermitted study and intenseness of mind. But though this bodily indisposition may be a hindrance to me in setting forth the just praises of my most worthy countrymen, who have been the saviours of their native country, and whose exploits, worthy of immortality, are already famous all the world over; yet I hope it will be no difficult matter for me to defend them from the insolence of this silly little scholar, and from that saucy tongue of his, at least. Nature and laws would be in an ill case, if slavery should find what to say for itself, and liberty be mute; and if tyrants should find men to plead for them, and they that can master and vanquish tyrants should not be able to find advocates: and it were a deplorable thing indeed, if the reason mankind is endued withal, and which is the gift of God, should not furnish more arguments for men's preservation, for their deliverance, and, as much as the nature of the thing will bear, for making them equal to one another, than for their oppression, and for their utter ruin under

the domineering power of one single person. Let me therefore enter upon this noble cause with a cheerfulness, grounded upon this assurance, that my adversary's cause is maintained by nothing but fraud, fallacy, ignorance, and barbarity; whereas mine has light, truth, reason, the practice and the learning of the best ages of the world, of its side."

In 1654 Milton published his '*Defensio secunda contra Infamem Libellum Anonymum, cui titulus, Regii Sanguinis Clamor ad Cælum adversus Parricidas Anglicanos.*'\*

This commences with another magnificent passage regarding himself:—

"*Jam videor mihi, ingressus iter, transmarinos tractus et porrectas late regiones, sublimis perlustrare; vultus innumeros atque ignotos, animi sensus mecum conjunctissimos: hinc Germanorum virile et infestum servituti robur, inde Francorum vividi dignique nomine liberales impetus, hinc Hispanorum consulta virtus, Italorum inde sedata suique compos magnanimitas ob oculos versatur. Quicquid uspiam liberorum pectorum, quicquid ingenui, quicquid magnanimi aut prudens latet aut se palam profitetur, alii tacite favere, alii aperte suffragari, accurrere alii et plausu accipere, alii tandem vero victi, dedititios se tradere. Videor jam mihi, tantis circumseptus*

\* The author of this book was Peter de Moulin, afterwards Prebendary of Canterbury. See an '*Account of Alexander Morus,*' among the *Literati of Geneva*, where he published many books. See Senebier's '*Histoire Littéraire.*'

copiis, ab Herculeis usque columnis ad extremos Liberi patris terminos, libertatem diu pulsam atque exulem, longo intervallo domum ubique gentium reducere: et, quod Triptolemus olim fertur, sed longe nobiliorem Cereali illa frugem ex civitate mea gentibus importare; restitutum nempe civilem liberumque vitæ cultum, per urbes, per regna, perque nationes disseminare," &c.

"I seem to survey, as from a towering height, the far-extended tracts of sea and land, and innumerable crowds of spectators, betraying in their looks the liveliest interest, and sensations the most congenial with my own: here I behold the stout and manly prowess of the German, disdaining servitude; there the generous and lively impetuosity of the French; on this side the calm and stately valour of the Spaniard; on that the composed and wary magnanimity of the Italian. Of all the lovers of liberty and virtue, the magnanimous and the wise, in whatever quarter they may be found, some secretly favour, others openly approve; some greet me with congratulations and applause; others, who had long been proof against conviction, at last yield themselves captive to the force of truth. Surrounded by congregated multitudes, I now imagine, that, from the columns of Hercules to the Indian ocean, I behold the nations of the earth recovering that liberty which they so long had lost; and that the people of this island are transporting to other countries a plant of more beneficial qualities, and more noble growth, than that which Triptolemus is reported to have carried

from region to region; that they are disseminating the blessings of civilization and freedom among cities, kingdoms, and nations. Nor shall I approach unknown, *nor perhaps unloved*, if it be told that I am the same person, who engaged in single combat that fierce advocate of despotism, till then reputed invincible in the opinion of many, and in his own conceit, who insolently challenged us and our armies to the combat; but whom, while I repelled his virulence, I silenced with his own weapons; and over whom, if I may trust to the opinion of impartial judges, I gained a complete and glorious victory."

In 1659 Milton published his 'Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes, showing, that it is not lawful for any Power on earth to compel in matters of religion.'

The same year he published 'Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the Church; wherein is also discoursed of Tithes, Church-fees, and Church-revenues; and whether any Maintenance of Ministers can be settled by law.'

He wrote also 'A Letter to a Friend concerning the Ruptures of the Commonwealth;' and, 'The Present Means and Brief Delineation of a Free Commonwealth, easy to be put in practice, and without delay; in a Letter to General Monk.'

In 1660 he published 'The ready and easy way to establish a free Commonwealth, and the excellence thereof compared with the inconveniences and dangers of re-admitting Kingship in the realm.'

In the same year he published ‘Brief Notes upon a late Sermon, titled the Fear of God, preached and since published by Matthew Grifith, D. D., and Chaplain to the late King, wherein many notorious wrestings of Scripture, and other falsities, are observed.’

I cannot help lamenting that Milton spent so many years in these bitter political and sectarian squabbles: ‘coarser minds’ would have done for that work. He was always powerful—sometimes splendid; but here his passions were human, and too often mingled with earthly dross. That magnificent and stupendous imagination must have often slept: his faculties duly employed might have produced other epic poems equal to ‘Paradise Lost:’ he might even have gained something more of facility and softness: other gardens of Eden might have been described, and human passions of half-etherial sublimity might have been embodied: his youthful purpose of some romantic tale of chivalry might also have been executed.

Perhaps he would never have attained to the rich profusion of Spenser; but he would have been far more nervous, gigantic, and heaven-exalted in his characters and descriptions: he would have painted castles and battles and enchantments with a darker, more awful, and more prophet-like power: he would have given, by a few mighty strokes, what Spenser somewhat weakens by the expanded multiplicity of his touches. With the collected sternness of Dante, and the gloomy touches of his inspired vein, he



would have filled the imagination with something of superhuman exaltation of visionary grandeur.

What themes for a creative mind did the superstitions, manners, and traditionary tales of chivalry offer! Milton's memory was stored with this branch of literature, and delighted in it; and his faculty of sublime fiction could have added to it any ornaments he chose: but mighty as was his imagery, the spiritual part of his power was still mightier: magnificence of thought and sentiment is his prime characteristic. It is his force of reflection and comment, which overcomes and electrifies us; the vast extent of his views; his comprehension, and stupendous grasp: and, while he speaks as a poet, he speaks also as a sage, and a philosopher.

How would he have described the Crusades above all other poets! What endless diversity of scenery, heroism, customs, incidents, moral and intellectual character; observation, learning, opinion, reasoning, principles, would he have supplied! This would have been far superior to the story of 'King Arthur,' in which, perhaps, there is some mixture of childishness, unbecoming the lofty bard's austere grandeur.

While Milton's mind was immersed for twenty years in all those mean contests of human ambition or bigotry, in which intrigue, artifice, and selfish passions pervert and darken the heart and the head, he must have stifled those radiant visions of spiritual purity, which were his natural food and delight. A suppressed fire often turns

to poison ; and perhaps it gave some embitterment to the poet's feelings : but the fire now and then blazed unexpectedly in a glorious flame amid endless pages of subtle or heavy prose.

Perhaps he would not have lost his eye-sight, if he had pored less over these controversial mysteries, dry as the dust of the barren desert. The dreams of imagination give rest to the eyes, and are brightest when the outward view is closed.

The vexatious humours with which the poet had to contend must have added to the irritable temperament of his frame. He was naturally "a choleric man," according to the report of Mrs. Powell, the mother of his first wife ; and he had a scorn of mean intellects and unlearned persons. Loftiness was a prime ingredient in his disposition, as well as in his mental faculties : detraction and contumely enraged him : his opinions were strong and fixed—he would bend to no man. As he never deviated from the paths of duty he had chalked out, so opposition embittered his temper, or excited his scorn : he was not one, therefore, who could buffet in troubled waters without a great wear of his frame. He himself says, that he lost his sight "overplied in liberty's defence." This was, no doubt, true :—the sour humours of the body might, by a natural effect, disease the eyes : they were tender even in his youth.

The cause of liberty, pursued from the purest motives, if it could be separated from the constant participation of the great body who are actuated

by a love of licentiousness, and an envious desire to overturn and plunder the great and the rich, would become such a mind as Milton's: but the large mass of the active movers of that celebrated contest was of a temper, and passion, and principle utterly unfitted to the bard's holy spirit. He was blinded by his zeal in a cause in which his heart and his convictions were embarked, and he reaped the fruit of the food he sought in bitterness and sorrow: he found thorns and brambles and weeds without end, wherever he applied his sickle.

Opinions differ concerning the character of the sovereign, against whom he lifted his voice and his hand. That unhappy monarch was so placed by birth and circumstances, that perhaps the wisest man and the greatest hero could not have escaped safe, much less victorious. He had some weaknesses, of which a leading one was ductility: he was a man of elegant taste, numerous accomplishments, varied learning, with a sensitive, generous heart, and undoubted piety: he entertained some notions of kingly power, which in these days would be generally condemned; but in the times in which he imbibed and persevered in them, it would have been truly extraordinary if he had thought otherwise. The most plausible charge laid against his character is insincerity: this arose from want of firmness. He was sometimes led into momentary concessions contrary to his conviction.

The trust he put in Buckingham cannot be

entirely excused, because that minister was deficient in almost every quality necessary to a statesman: his want of high talents, his profligacy, his profusion, his deficiency in all the grand principles of a sound government, his corruption, his reckless indiscretions, offered a mark for the revolutionary passions of the age, which they could not miss. But the system of favouritism was then the general fault of monarchs; and Charles had a warm and friendly heart, which could not easily give up an attachment. On the contrary, the unfortunate prince has been blamed for sacrificing Strafford: for that afflicting charge nothing less than extreme *duresse* can be an excuse.

When once the sword of civil contest is drawn, neither party thinks itself safe till it has destroyed the other: this is the excuse the parliamentarians plead for putting Charles to death. I shall never cease to consider it a bloodthirsty and unpardonable act. All my veneration for Milton, and all the power of argument of his mighty mind, will not alter that opinion.

The opposition to the rule of Kings had been secretly brooding and fomenting through Europe for near a century, but had been kept down in England by the magnanimous and prudent spirit of Queen Elizabeth: but the Puritans had been constantly at work against her throne, while the Jesuits beset it on other principles, and with other views. At Milton's birth, the imbecility of King James had encouraged that spirit in the

former growing sect, which struck at the root of all ancient institutions. Milton probably drank in these schisms with his earliest breath; but for a time his classical and romantic studies, the glories of his poetical imagination, his neighbourhood to the feudal hospitalities of Harefield, the smiles of Spenser's patroness, the noble and splendid pageantry of Ludlow Castle, and his travels among the seats of the ancient arts, the heroic fablings of Tasso, and the glowing recollections of the Marquis Manso in the Elysian scenery of the sunny bay of Naples, suspended, and nearly expelled them.

But when the discordant trumpet of open civil strife was once sounded, and by an unhappy spell excited all the early predilections which had been instilled into his childhood, the Muse, for whom nature had best fitted him, was for a long time forgotten; and all the crabbed lore of puritanical gloom overshadowed the native fire of a heavenly imagination.

In whatever turn his mind took, he had power and force to go beyond other men. When his gigantic strength entered the field of battle, like Samson, he would lay all prostrate before him; and like him, rather than submit and give triumph to his foes, would have grasped the columns, and brought the tumbling roof of the theatre\* on the heads of all; willing to fall himself in the common

\* The building was a spacious theatre,

Half-round,—on two main pillars vaulted high.

AGON. l. 1607, seq.

ruin, rather than let the proud and the mighty prevail over him. Here lay his ambition; here he had something of the spirit of his Fallen Angels. To him all monarchs of the ordinary vigour of human intellect appeared but as children of the dust: in the conscious vastness of his intellectual supremacy, he met them, when they put on the armour of assault, with scorn and defiance.

## CHAPTER XII.

## MILTON'S CONTROVERSIAL WRITINGS.

ON March 15, 1648-9, the council of state appointed Milton secretary for the foreign tongues. In 1652 the poet's eyesight was intirely lost; but he was still continued in his office, and allowed an assistant, Mr. Philip Meadows. About this time his first wife died, leaving him three daughters. He did not re-marry till 1658. This second wife was daughter of Captain Woodcock, of Hackney: she died in childbed the next year, and was buried at St. Margaret's, Westminster, 10th February, 1657.

On April 17, 1655, it was ordered that "the former salary of Mr. John Milton of two hundred eighty-eight pounds, &c., formerly charged on the council's contingencies, be reduced to one hundred and fiftie pounds per annum, and paid to him during his life out of his Highnesse's exchequer."

Bishop Sumner says it is presumed that from this time Milton ceased to be employed in public affairs: but Todd gives proofs that he continued

to be employed long afterwards, first with the aid of Philip Meadows, and afterwards, in 1657, of Andrew Marvell, the poet, whose noble panegyrical verses are prefixed to the *Paradise Lost*.\*

As late as the 25th of October, 1659, there is a warrant of state for the payment to John Milton and Andrew Marvell of £86 12s. each, at the rate for each of £200 per annum.

A little before the king's coming over, Milton was sequestered from his Latin secretaryship, and the salary.

In 1658 he amused himself by editing from a MS. 'the Cabinet-Council of Raleigh.'

Whatever merit Milton might have in the able and learned discharge of his political services, it is deeply to be lamented that his brilliant and sublime faculties were so employed. He had a mind too creative to be wasted in writing down official dispatches, or turning them into classical Latin: humble talents would have done better for such laborious and technical tasks. How the slumbering fire of his rich and every-varying fictions must have consumed his heart and his brain!—How he must have fretted at the base intrigues of courts and councils, and the turpitude of human ambition!—While immured within dark and close official walls, how he must have sighed and pined to be courting his splendid visions of a

\* A curious letter of Milton's to Lord President Bradshaw, as early as 1653, recommending Marvell as an assistant, is given by Todd, then lately discovered in the State-Paper Office.



higher and more congenial world on the banks of some haunted stream!—The woods and forests, the mountains, seas, and lakes, ought to have been his dwelling-places.—The whispers of the spring, or the roaring of the winter-winds, ought to have soothed or excited his spirits.—In those regions ærial beings visit the earth; there the soul sees what the concourse of mankind puts to flight; there the mean passions, that corrupt the human bosom, have no abode.

To make a man of business requires nothing but petty and watchful observation, cold reserve, and selfish craft: to catch the moment when caution in others is asleep; to raise hopes, yet promise nothing; to seem to give full information, yet to be so vague, that every thing is open to escape. How can the poet practise such arts as these? He is lost in himself; he is wrapped up in his own creations.

Milton has left interspersed in his controversial writings fragments of autobiography which have every sort of value. They are full of facts;—are vigorous, wise, eloquent, and sublime.

They are also proofs of that enthusiasm of character, which led the poet to those ideal views of liberty that are inconsistent with human frailty.

Of such passages the first, and perhaps most interesting, is the writer's description of his own person:—

“I do not believe,” says the poet, “that I was ever once noted for deformity, by any one who ever saw me; but the praise of beauty I am not

anxious to obtain. My stature certainly is not tall; but it rather approaches the middle than the diminutive. Yet what if it were diminutive, when so many men, illustrious both in peace and war, have been the same? And how can that be called diminutive, which is great enough for every virtuous achievement? Nor, though very thin, was I ever deficient in courage or in strength; and I was wont constantly to exercise myself in the use of the sword, as long as it comported with my habits and my years. Armed with this weapon, as I usually was, I should have thought myself quite a match for any one, though much stronger than myself; and I felt perfectly secure against the assault of any open enemy. At this moment I have the same courage, the same strength, though not the same eyes; yet so little do they betray any external appearance of injury, that they are as unclouded and bright as the eyes of those who most distinctly see. In this instance alone I am a dissembler against my will. My face, which is said to indicate a total privation of blood, is of a complexion entirely opposite to the pale and the cadaverous; so that, though I am more than forty years old, there is scarcely any one to whom I do not appear ten years younger than I am; and the smoothness of my skin is not, in the least, affected by the wrinkles of age."

His adversary had maliciously and daringly accused him of looseness of life and conversation. To this Milton indignantly thus replies:—"But because as well by this upbraiding to me the

bordelloes, as by other suspicious glancings in his book, he would seem privily to point me out to his readers, as one whose custom of life were not honest, but licentious; I shall intreat to be born with, though I digress; and in a way not often trod, acquaint ye with the sum of my thoughts in this matter, through the course of my years and studies; although I am not ignorant how hazardous it will be to do this under the nose of the envious, as it were in skirmish to change the compact order, and instead of outward actions to bring inmost thoughts into front. And I must tell ye, readers, that by this sort of men I have been already bitten at; yet shall they not for me know how slightly they are esteemed, unless they have so much learning as to read what in Greek ἀπειροκαλία is, which, together with envy, is the common disease of those who censure books that are not for their reading. With me it fares now, as with him whose outward garment hath been injured and ill-bedighted; for having no other shift, what help but to turn the inside outwards, especially if the lining be of the same, or, as it is sometimes, much better? So if my name and outward demeanour be not evident enough to defend me, I must make trial if the discovery of my inmost thoughts can: wherein of two purposes both honest, and both sincere, the one perhaps I shall not miss: although I fail to gain belief with others, of being such as my perpetual thoughts shall here disclose me, I may yet not fail of success in persuading some to be such

really themselves, as they cannot believe me to be more than what I fain. I had my time, readers, as others have, who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places, where the opinion was, it might be soonest attained; and as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended; whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me, and for their matter, which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allured to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome: for that it was then those years with me which are excused, though they be least severe, I may be saved the labour to remember ye. Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love those high perfections, which under one or other name they took to celebrate; I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more

love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises: for albeit these thoughts to some will seem virtuous and commendable, to others only pardonable, to a third sort perhaps idle; yet the mentioning of them now will end in serious. Nor blame it, readers, in those years to propose to themselves such a reward, as the noblest dispositions above other things in this life have sometimes preferred: whereof not to be sensible when good and fair in one person meet, argues both a gross and shallow judgment, and withal an ungentle, and swainish breast: for by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient, that if I found those authors any where speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled; this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that

which is praiseworthy. These reasonings, together with a certain niceness of nature, an honest haughtiness, and self-esteem either of what I was, or what I might be, (which let envy call pride,) and lastly that modesty, whereof though not in the title page, yet here I may be excused to make some beseeeming profession; all these uniting the supply of their natural aid together, kept me still above those low descents of mind, beneath which he must deject and plunge himself, that can agree to salable and unlawful prostitutions. Next, (for hear me out now, readers,) that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered; I betook me among those lofty fables and romances, which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight, that he should defend to the expense of his best blood, or of his life, if it so befel him, the honour and chastity of virgin or matron; from whence even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be, to the defence of which so many worthies, by such a dear adventure of themselves, had sworn; and if I found in the story afterward, any of them, by word or deed, breaking that oath, I judged it the same fault of the poet, as that which is attributed to Homer, to have written indecent things of the gods: only this my mind gave me, that every free and gentle spirit, without that oath, ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon

his shoulder, to stir him up, both by his counsel and his arms, to secure and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity. So that even these books, which to many others have been the fuel of wantonness and loose living, I cannot think how, unless by divine indulgence, proved to me so many incitements, as you have heard, to the love and steadfast observation of that virtue which abhors the society of bordelloes. Thus, from the laureat fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy; but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato, and his equal Xenophon: where, if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love, I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy; (the rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion, which a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about;) and how the first and chiefest office of love begins and ends in the soul, producing those happy twins of her divine generation, knowledge and virtue—with such abstracted sublimities as these; it might be worth your listening, readers; as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time, when there shall be no chiding; not in these noises.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

## MILTON'S CHARACTER OF CROMWELL, &amp;c.

THIS character is of the utmost importance, because it will show us what the great republican thought of the Protector's services, and what he expected from him.

“Oliver Cromwell was sprung from a line of illustrious ancestors, who were distinguished for the civil functions which they sustained under the monarchy, and still more for the part which they took in restoring and establishing true religion in this country. In the vigour and maturity of his life, which he passed in retirement, he was conspicuous for nothing more than for the strictness of his religious habits and the innocence of his manners; and he had tacitly cherished in his breast that flame of piety which was afterwards to stand him in so much stead on the greatest occasions, and in the most critical exigencies. In the last parliament which was called by the king, he was elected to represent his native town; when he soon became distinguished by the justness of his opinions, and the vigour and decision of his counsels. When the sword was drawn, he offered



his services, and was appointed to a troop of horse, whose numbers were soon increased by the pious and the good, who flocked from all quarters to his standard; and in a short time he almost surpassed the greatest generals in the magnitude and the rapidity of his achievements. Nor is this surprising; for he was a soldier disciplined to perfection in the knowledge of himself: he had either extinguished, or by habit had learned to subdue, the whole host of vain hopes, fears, and passions, which infest the soul. He first acquired the government of himself, and over himself acquired the most signal victories; so that on the first day he took the field against the external enemy, he was a veteran in arms, consummately practised in the toils and exigencies of war. It is not possible for me, in the narrow limits in which I circumscribe myself on this occasion, to enumerate the many towns which he has taken, the many battles which he has won. The whole surface of the British empire has been the scene of his exploits, and the theatre of his triumphs; which alone would furnish ample materials for a history, and want a copiousness of narration not inferior to the magnitude and diversity of the transactions. This alone seems to be a sufficient proof of his extraordinary and almost supernatural virtue, that by the vigour of his genius, or the excellence of his discipline, adapted not more to the necessities of war than to the precepts of Christianity, the good and the brave were from all quarters attracted to his camp, not only as to

the best school of military talents, but of piety and virtue; and that during the whole war, and the occasional intervals of peace, amid so many vicissitudes of faction and of events, he retained and still retains the obedience of his troops, not by largesses or indulgence, but by his sole authority, and the regularity of his pay. In this instance his fame may rival that of Cyrus, of Epaminondas, or any of the great generals of antiquity. Hence he collected an army as numerous and as well equipped as any one ever did in so short a time; which was uniformly obedient to his orders, and dear to the affections of the citizens; which was formidable to the enemy in the field, but never cruel to those who laid down their arms; which committed no lawless ravages on the persons or the property of the inhabitants; who, when they compared their conduct with the turbulence, the intemperance, the impiety, and the debauchery of the royalists, were wont to salute them as friends, and to consider them as guests. They were a stay to the good, a terror to the evil, and the warmest advocates for every exertion of piety and virtue. Nor would it be right to pass over the name of Fairfax, who united the utmost fortitude with the utmost courage; and the spotless innocence of whose life seemed to point him out as the peculiar favourite of Heaven. Justly indeed may you be excited to receive this wreath of praise; though you have retired as much as possible from the world, and seek those shades of privacy which were the delight of

Scipio. Nor was it only the enemy whom you subdued ; but you have triumphed over that flame of ambition and that lust of glory, which are wont to make the best and the greatest of men their slaves. The purity of your virtues and the splendour of your actions consecrate those sweets of ease which you enjoy, and which constitute the wished-for haven of the toils of man. Such was the ease which, when the heroes of antiquity possessed, after a life of exertion and glory not greater than yours, the poets, in despair of finding ideas or expressions better suited to the subject, feigned that they were received into heaven, and invited to recline at the tables of the gods. But whether it were your health, which I principally believe, or any other motive which caused you to retire, of this I am convinced ; that nothing could have induced you to relinquish the service of your country if you had not known that in your successor liberty would meet with a protector, and England with a stay to its safety, and a pillar to its glory : for, while you, O Cromwell, are left among us, he hardly shows a proper confidence in the Supreme, who distrusts the security of England ; when he sees that you are in so special a manner the favoured object of the divine regard. But there was another department of the war, which was destined for your exclusive exertions.

“ Without entering into any length of detail, I will, if possible, describe some of the most memorable actions with as much brevity as you performed them with celerity. After the loss of all

Ireland, with the exception of one city, you in one battle immediately discomfited the forces of the rebels; and were busily employed in settling the country, when you were suddenly recalled to the war in Scotland. Hence you proceeded with unwearied diligence against the Scots, who were on the point of making an irruption into England with the king in their train; and in about the space of one year, you entirely subdued, and added to the English dominion, that kingdom, which all our monarchs, during a period of eight hundred years, had in vain struggled to subject. In one battle you almost annihilated the remainder of their forces, who, in a fit of desperation, had made a sudden incursion into England, then almost destitute of garrisons, and got as far as Worcester; where you came up with them by forced marches, and captured almost the whole of their nobility. A profound peace ensued; when we found, though indeed not then for the first time, that you were as wise in the cabinet as valuable in the field. It was your constant endeavour in the senate either to induce them to adhere to those treaties which they had entered into with the enemy, or speedily to adjust others which promised to be beneficial to the country. But when you saw that the business was artfully procrastinated, that every one was more intent on his own selfish interest than on the public good, that the people complained of the disappointments which they had experienced, and the fallacious promises by which they had been gulled, that they were the dupes of a few over-

bearing individuals, you put an end to their domination. A new parliament is summoned; and the right of election given to those to whom it was expedient: they meet; but do nothing; and after having wearied themselves by their mutual dissensions, and fully exposed their incapacity to the observation of the country, they consent to a voluntary dissolution. In this state of desolation, to which we were reduced, you, O Cromwell! alone remained to conduct the government, and to save the country. We all willingly yield the palm of sovereignty to your unrivalled ability and virtue, except the few among us, who, either ambitious of honours which they have not the capacity to sustain, or who envy those which are conferred on one more worthy than themselves, or else who do not know that nothing in the world is more pleasing to God, more agreeable to reason, more politically just, or more generally useful, than that the supreme power should be vested in the best and the wisest of men. Such, O Cromwell, all acknowledge you to be; such are the services which you have rendered, as the leader of our councils, the general of our armies, and the father of your country; for this is the tender appellation by which all the good among us salute you from the very soul. Other names you neither have nor could endure; and you deservedly reject that pomp of title which attracts the gaze and admiration of the multitude: for what is a title but a certain definite mode of dignity? but actions such as yours, surpass, not only the bounds of our

admiration, but our titles; and like the points of pyramids, which are lost in the clouds, they soar above the possibilities of titular commendation. But since, though it be not fit, it may be expedient, that the highest pitch of virtue should be circumscribed within the bounds of some human appellation, you endured to receive, for the public good, a title most like to that of the father of your country; not to exalt, but rather to bring you nearer to the level of ordinary men; the title of King was unworthy the transcendent majesty of your character: for if you had been captivated by a name, over which, as a private man, you had so completely triumphed and crumbled into dust, you would have been doing the same thing as if, after having subdued some idolatrous nation by the help of the true God, you should afterwards fall down and worship the gods which you had vanquished. Do you then, sir, continue your course with the same unrivalled magnanimity; it sits well upon you;—to you our country owes its liberties, nor can you sustain a character at once more momentous and more august than that of the author, the guardian, and the preserver of our liberties; and hence you have not only eclipsed the achievements of all our Kings, but even those which have been fabled of our heroes. Often reflect what a dear pledge the beloved land of your nativity has entrusted to your care; and that liberty which she once expected only from the chosen flower of her talents and her virtues, she now expects from you only, and by you only

hopes to obtain. Revere the fond expectations which we cherish, the solitudes of your anxious country; revere the looks and the wounds of your brave companions in arms, who, under your banners, have so strenuously fought for liberty; revere the shades of those who perished in the contest; revere also the opinions and the hopes which foreign states entertain concerning us, who promise to themselves so many advantages from that liberty, which we have so bravely acquired, from the establishment of that new government, which has begun to shed its splendour on the world, which, if it be suffered to vanish like a dream, would involve us in the deepest abyss of shame; and lastly revere yourself; and, after having endured so many sufferings and encountered so many perils for the sake of liberty, do not suffer it, now it is obtained, either to be violated by yourself, or in any one instance impaired by others.

“ You cannot be truly free unless we are free too; for such is the nature of things, that he, who entrenches on the liberty of others, is the first to lose his own, and become a slave. But, if you, who have hitherto been the patron and tutelary genius of liberty; if you, who are exceeded by no one in justice, in piety, and goodness, should hereafter invade that liberty which you have defended, your conduct must be fatally operative, not only against the cause of liberty, but the general interests of piety and virtue. Your integrity and virtue will appear to have evaporated, your

faith in religion to have been small; your character with posterity will dwindle into insignificance, by which a most destructive blow will be levelled against the happiness of mankind. The work which you have undertaken is of incalculable moment, which will thoroughly sift and expose every principle and sensation of your heart, which will fully display the vigour and genius of your character, which will evince whether you really possess those great qualities of piety, fidelity, justice, and self-denial, which made us believe that you were elevated by the special direction of the Deity to the highest pinnacle of power. At once wisely and discreetly to hold the sceptre over three powerful nations, to persuade people to relinquish inveterate and corrupt for new and more beneficial maxims and institutions, to penetrate into the remotest parts of the country, to have the mind present and operative in every quarter, to watch against surprise, to provide against danger, to reject the blandishments of pleasure and the pomp of power;—these are exertions, compared with which the labour of war is mere pastime; which will require every energy and employ every faculty that you possess; which demand a man supported from above, and almost instructed by immediate inspiration.”

I add to this some important queries, applicable to all times, addressed by the great politician to the people themselves. They will be read at this time with the deepest interest:—

“For who would vindicate your right of un-



restrained suffrage, or of choosing what representatives you liked best, merely that you might elect the creatures of your own faction, whoever they might be, or him, however small might be his worth, who would give you the most lavish feasts, and enable you to drink to the greatest excess? Thus not wisdom and authority, but turbulence and gluttony, would soon exalt the vilest miscreants from our taverns and our brothels, from our towns and villages, to the rank and dignity of senators. For, should the management of the republic be entrusted to persons to whom no one would willingly entrust the management of his private concerns; and the treasury of the state be left to the care of those who had lavished their own fortunes in an infamous prodigality? Should they have the charge of the public purse, which they would soon convert into a private, by their unprincipled peculations? Are they fit to be the legislators of a whole people who themselves know not what law, what reason, what right and wrong, what crooked and straight, what licit and illicit means? who think that all power consists in outrage, all dignity in the parade of insolence? who neglect every other consideration for the corrupt gratification of their friendships, or the prosecution of their resentments? who disperse their own relations and creatures through the provinces, for the sake of levying taxes and confiscating goods; men, for the greater part, the most profligate and vile, who buy up for themselves what they pretend to expose to sale, who thence collect an exorbitant

mass of wealth, which they fraudulently divert from the public service; who thus spread their pillage through the country, and in a moment emerge from penury and rags to a state of splendour and of wealth? Who could endure such thievish servants, such vicegerents of their lords? Who could believe that the masters and the patrons of a banditti could be the proper guardians of liberty? or who would suppose that he should ever be made one hair more free by such a set of public functionaries, (though they might amount to five hundred elected in this manner from the counties and boroughs,) when among them who are the very guardians of liberty, and to whose custody it is committed, there must be so many, who know not either how to use or to enjoy liberty, who either understand the principles or merit the possession?"

I now resume my remarks upon the poet's genius and acquirements.

Milton's knowledge of human nature was confined to general traits: he had not detected the minute foldings and smaller particularities, nor opened those secret movements of the passions, which familiarise us with private life. All was drawn with the enlarged eye of his own magnificent mind. In this respect he was utterly dissimilar to Shakspeare: he had none of the dramatist's playfulness and flexibility. Milton was always Milton, as Byron was always Byron: neither of them could transport himself into other characters. He spoke of others as an observer; not as

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identified with them. It appears to me, that this individuality will be found to go through all Milton's writings, and all the conduct of his life: he lived among a world of inferior beings, to whom his stern sublimity could not conform. This showed itself in the very outset of his career,—at college,—where he rebelled against academical discipline; and to this in a great degree may be attributed the vehement and relentless part he took against royalty, and also his separation from the sect with whom he commenced his warfare against the throne.

Villemaine, in his life of the poet in the '*Bio-graphie Universelle*,' notices this inflexibility, and the unfitness for practical commerce with the world which it caused.

Yet hence arose many of the grand thoughts and gigantic images that adorned and exalted his poetry: thus he never fell beneath his lofty sphere. Such is the view I take of him in his private character: my business is not to repeat what I find in other books, but to examine for myself. I do not undertake to bring together all which has been said already; on the contrary, much which has been said before seems to me to be on that account not necessary to be said again: I do not desire to supersede other biographers, but rather wish to be admitted among them. I have the hope of saying something which is not to be found elsewhere, and such as will gain the assent of others at least for its probability; for I scorn to seek for novelty at the expense of truth.

All the facts of Milton's life have been laboriously searched for, and brought forward already: opinions upon them are not yet exhausted: unfortunately too many biographers copy each other in this portion of their task: they are either incapable of thinking for themselves, or they do not venture it: they scarcely even vary the expressions. The effect of this is nausea to the purchaser of such books: the "*decies repetita*" is always repulsive. Perhaps it will be answered, that what had been before observed was just, and therefore required no alteration: if so, the public did not want the renewal of that of which it was in possession.

Johnson is a critic who has always been a favourite with English readers: his piquancy and severity please; but these, when applied to Milton, are by persons of imagination or taste read with distaste from their perverse and wilful malignity. They often show the vigour of the critic's intellect, and the ingenuity of his pointed language; but they are false or exaggerated in decision, and irreverent and harsh in language. The splendour of Milton's genius ought to have kept aloof such pedantic petulance. If such faults could have been justly imputed to him, still the author of '*Paradise Lost*' should have been approached with awe, and commented on with the most decorous and profound respect. What right had Johnson to attack and blacken the poet's moral character by imputing motives of passion and ill-humour to him, which he has

himself in the most positive and solemn manner denied? He saw the abuses of the existing government, he deluded himself with the hope that by a grand change his own ideal views of perfection might be accomplished. If we believe him,—and he must have a most ungenerous and corrupt mind who can doubt,—his heart was the seat of all earthly integrity, and exalted by the most purified and spiritual aspirations. Of all mean passions, envy could least enter a bosom which had so lofty and calm a confidence in the superiority of its own intellectual gifts: no man envies what he scorns and estimates at nothing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

MILTON'S BLINDNESS, AND OCCUPATIONS AFTER  
THE RESTORATION.

MILTON'S enemies had had the baseness to charge his blindness as a judgment upon him: he repels this charge with a just indignation, at the opening of his 'Second Defence for the People of England.'

"I wish," commences this magnificent passage, "that I could with equal facility refute what this barbarous opponent has said of my blindness; but I cannot do it, and I must submit to the affliction. It is not so wretched to be blind, as it is not to be capable of enduring blindness. But why should I not endure a misfortune, which it behoves every one to be prepared to endure if it should happen; which may, in the common course of things, happen to any man, and which has been known to have happened to the most distinguished and virtuous persons in history? What is reported of the Augur Tiresias is well known; of whom Apollonius sung thus in his 'Argonautics:'—

To men he dared the will divine disclose,  
Nor fear'd what Jove might in his wrath impose.  
The gods assign'd him age without decay,  
But snatch'd the blessing of his sight away.

But God himself is truth; in propagating which, as men display a greater integrity and zeal, they approach nearer to the similitude of God, and possess a greater portion of his love. We cannot suppose the Deity envious of truth, or unwilling that it should be freely communicated to mankind: the loss of sight, therefore, which this inspired sage, who was so eager in promoting knowledge among men, sustained, cannot be considered as a judicial punishment: and did not our Saviour himself declare that that poor man whom he had restored to sight had not been born blind, either on account of his own sins, or those of his progenitors?

“And with respect to myself, though I have accurately examined my conduct, and scrutinized my soul, I call thee, O God, the searcher of hearts, to witness, that I am not conscious, either in the more early or in the later periods of my life, of having committed any enormity which might deservedly have marked me out as a fit object for such a calamitous visitation: but since my enemies boast that this affliction is only a retribution for the transgressions of my pen, I again invoke the Almighty to witness that I never at any time wrote any thing which I did not think agreeable to truth, to justice, and to piety. This was my persuasion then, and I feel the same persuasion now. Thus, therefore, when I was publicly solicited to write a reply to the defence of the royal cause, when I had to contend with the pressure of sickness, and with the apprehension of soon

losing the sight of my remaining eye, and when my medical attendants clearly announced, that if I did engage in this work it would be irreparably lost, their premonitions caused no hesitation and inspired no dismay: I would not have listened to the voice even of Esculapius himself from the shrine of Epidauris, in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast: my resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight or the desertion of my duty; and I called to mind those two destinies which the oracle of Delphi announced to the son of Thetis.

“ I considered that many had purchased a less good by a greater evil, the meed of glory by the loss of life; but that I might procure great good by little suffering; that, though I am blind, I might still discharge the most honourable duties, the performance of which, as it is something more durable than glory, ought to be an object of superior admiration and esteem; I resolved, therefore, to make the short interval of sight which was left me to enjoy as beneficial as possible to the public interest.

“ But, if the choice were necessary, I would, sir, prefer my blindness to yours; yours is a cloud spread over the mind, which darkens both the light of reason and of conscience; mine keeps from my view only the coloured surfaces of things, while it leaves me at liberty to contemplate the beauty and stability of virtue and of truth. How many things are there besides which I would not



willingly see ; how many which I must see against my will ; and how few which I feel any anxiety to see ! There is, as the Apostle has remarked, a way to strength through weakness. Let me then be the most feeble creature alive, as long as that feebleness serves to invigorate the energies of my rational and immortal spirit ; as long as in that obscurity, in which I am enveloped, the light of the Divine presence more clearly shines ! And, indeed, in my blindness, I enjoy in no inconsiderable degree the favour of the Deity ; who regards me with more tenderness and compassion in proportion as I am able to behold nothing but himself. Alas ! for him who insults me, who maligns and merits public execration ! For the Divine law not only shields me from injury, but almost renders me too sacred to attack ; not indeed so much from the privation of my sight, as from the overshadowing of those heavenly wings, which seem to have occasioned this obscurity. To this I ascribe the more tender assiduities of my friends, their soothing attentions, their kind visits, their reverential observances.”\*

Every one is familiar with the poet's twenty-second sonnet on this subject.

Cyriac, this three-years-day these eyes, though clear,—  
 Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot—  
 What supports me, dost thou ask ?  
 The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
 In liberty's defence, my noble task.

One is a little surprised that he could so long endure this laborious and tedious office of secre-

tary, especially after his sight began to fail him. His nephew, Edward Philips, for some time assisted him.

In 1652 he entirely lost his sight.

Todd has recovered a curious letter of Milton from the State-Paper Office, recommending his friend Andrew Marvell, the poet, for some employment:—"A gentleman, whose name is Mr. Marvell,—a man, both by report and the converse I have had with him, of singular desert for the state to make use of; who also offers himself, if there be any employment for him. His father was the minister of Hull, and he hath spent four years abroad in Holland, France, Italy, and Spain, to very good purpose, as I believe, and the gaining of these four languages;—besides, he is a scholar, and well read in the Latin and Greek authors; and, no doubt, of an approved conversation; for he comes now lately out of the house of the Lord Fairfax, who was general, where he was intrusted to give some instructions in the languages to the lady, his daughter."

This letter of Milton was written in 1653: but Marvell was not joined to Milton in the office of Latin secretary till 1657. Marvell's commendatory poem on the 'Paradise Lost' is well known:—

When I beheld the poet blind, yet bold,  
In slender book his vast design unfold; &c.

Milton's salary as Latin secretary was £288 18s. 6d. a year. In 1659, he was only paid at the rate of £200 a year, having then retired.

In this retirement, about two years before the

Restoration, he began the 'Paradise Lost.' Though retired, he was visited by all foreigners of distinction, and some persons of rank at home; but he was known and admired more for his political services than for his poetry.

He had, as has been mentioned, done little in poetry for the last twenty years, except his few sonnets: of these, Johnson speaks with a tasteless and unworthy contempt: that they are rich in thought, sentiment, and naked sublimity of language, is now undisputed.

It appears that Milton yet relaxed nothing of his mental activity. After the death of Cromwell he must have seen the incumbent danger of that republican form of government, which he had spent so much zeal and such gigantic talents to establish. Not only his head but his heart was involved in this establishment. He had worked himself to a fury against kings, and what he supposed to be the tyranny inseparable from their power. His ambition does not appear to have been in the least degree selfish;—he had no views of personal aggrandisement: he did not look to riches or political honours: he had no familiarity with those who were called the great: even with Cromwell, his idol, he seems to have had no individual intimacy. Lawrence, "of virtuous father virtuous son," and Cyriac Skinner, were his chief friends. Of the former he says,—

Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire  
Help waste a sullen day, what may be won  
From the hard season gaining? ———

He, who of those delights can judge, and spare  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

Even the genius of Milton could not have made the progress he did either in production or in learning, if he had admitted the frequent distractions of society. The history of his day is given by the biographers;—but it will not account for the immensity of his reading. The processes of such a mind it is too hazardous to attempt to analyse. His vast memory tempted him sometimes to incumber himself with abstruse and useless literature. One is a little astonished that a creative brain, which is constantly working its materials into new shapes and combinations, can reflect things precisely in the form and colours in which it receives them.—Even the ‘Paradise Lost’ is occasionally patched with allusions of this kind.—There is, however, an unaccountable charm in the manner in which the poet occasionally mentions remote names of persons and places. A single word calls up a whole train of ideas:—but then this is a mere reference to an instructed and rich memory.

Milton’s whole life ought to have been employed in creation, not reproduction.—But this opinion will not perhaps be commonly assented to, or even understood. The poet was a powerful reasoner in his political and theological discussions, but not always free from obscurity or sophistry. His heated mind saw certain questions in an exaggerated or partial view.

The time was now arriving, when it was neces-

sary to throw away and forget politics. In spite of all his efforts the monarchy was at length restored. He had now reason to dread the fate of the other regicides: it was necessary for a time to conceal himself: Vane and others were taken, condemned, and put to death. The part which Milton had taken in justifying the decapitation of the late King, by arguments and in language insulting and contemptuous, might reasonably have been suspected to have marked him out to the Court for a signal object of vengeance. He was finally spared: by what influences this was effected, is now little known: this act of mercy reflects great honour on the government.

Though there are many reasons to suppose that Milton's poetical fame was yet but little acknowledged, this extraordinary regard shown to him by sparing his life raises a contrary inference.—He had no claims for forbearance from the King on account of his political talents:—these were powers which it must have been desirable to crush. The greater part of those who had the monarch's ear were profligate men, who, even if they had been well acquainted with the poetry which the bard had hitherto put forth, would not have enjoyed it: even Lord Clarendon seems to have had no taste for this sort of genius: he commends Cowley as having taken a flight beyond other votaries of the Muses; and the historian's warm loyalism, in theory as well as personal attachment, would have felt abhorrence beyond other men for the immortal bard's political writings. We are con-

strained to leave the cause of this mercy in the dark, and give the glory to those who exerted it.

Now came in a flood of poetasters from the French school; dissolute, base-minded, and demoralising,—with little genius, but some wit,—epigrammatists, satirists, and buffoons,—ridiculing all that was grave, praising nothing but what was worldly and unprincipled.

It is true that Dryden was now beginning to work himself into fame, but on the French model; which, however, he improved by the force of thought and language, and harmony of vigorous versification. I need not observe how unlike was the genius of Milton and of Dryden: Johnson has admirably analysed the latter, to which his own taste inclined. He who is partial to Dryden, will never, I think, much relish Milton; though it will be objected that the case was otherwise with Gray, who is said to have united his admiration of both. There is a want of grandeur, of sentiment, of creation, of *visionariness* in Dryden. His style is clear, powerful, and buoyant; but his thoughts are often common, and his imagery is unpicturesque and vague: he was more intellectual than imaginative: his mind was turned to the world, and the observances of actual and daily life: he was often happy in acuteness of discrimination upon the manners and characters of the time: witness his portrait of Achitophel (Lord Shaftesbury). Here the extreme subtlety of his understanding displayed itself in full force.

This was exactly what suited the reigning taste

at this epoch. Let us contemplate Milton while such things were the rage. He had now withdrawn himself from the angry and harsh contests in which he had been so many years engaged, and was contemplating battles, a thousand-fold more exalted, of rebel angels with almighty power. Never, in his more worldly employments, seeing things but in their grandest phases, with what calm scorn must he now have looked down upon the petty witticisms of what the Court and nation now considered the brilliant emanations of poetic genius! Davenant was his friend, and Milton may have found some fine things in Gondibert; but there are no traces that the two poets had at this period any familiarity or intercourse. I do not recollect that Milton and Cowley were acquainted; nor do Milton's early poems seem to have come under Cowley's notice: if they had, he would assuredly have quoted them in his 'Prose Essays.'\*

The conduct of those who were now re-admitted to power was too well calculated to confirm the poet's hatred of monarchy: but in silent solitude and darkness he worked complacently on. Conscious of his own superiority of genius, he did not regard the loud applauses of the mob in favour of others. He did not wonder that the dissolute in life should have no taste for the pure spiritualities

\* In fact, when they appeared in 1645, he was in the King's service, and personally attended His Majesty; and he died in 1667, before the second edition of the poems, and the very year in which the 'Paradise Lost' was published.

of true poetry : he relied upon the rewards of posterity with a just and sure faith. While others were groping upon earth in sensual pleasures, he lived by his imagination in heaven : his outward blindness did but strengthen his inward light. Perhaps but for this blindness his creative faculties had not been sufficiently concentrated to produce his great poem. Something of this opinion he seems himself to have entertained ; thus drawing comfort from his misfortune. He was now shut out from worldly distractions ; and the day was as the covering calm of night to him. The humility of his fortune, the singularity of his habits, all aided contemplation. The Muse can never live, except feebly and languidly, amid material luxuries : she delights in the majesty of thought, the scorn of all sublunary pleasures.

The poet, in his long intercourse with the busy world, had, like others, shown the human passions of anger, bitterness, contempt, and invective ;—he now threw them all off : they nowhere appear in the sublime poetry he now produced, unless perhaps by slight allusion in a few passages of ‘*Samson Agonistes*,’ where the memory of the past revives a few stings.

In 1665 Milton married his third wife, Elizabeth Minshul, daughter of Sir Edward Minshul, knight, of an ancient Cheshire family. She survived him above fifty years, and, retiring to Nantwich in Cheshire, died there in 1727.

Ellwood, the quaker, now undertook to read



to him, for the sake of the advantage of his conversation and instruction.\* When the plague raged in London, 1663, Ellwood received Milton and his family into his house at Chalfont, St. Giles, in Buckinghamshire. Here Ellwood says it was that the poet communicated to him the manuscript of 'Paradise Lost.'

Bishop Newton remarks, that considering the difficulties "under which the author lay, his uneasiness at the public affairs and his own, his age and infirmities, his not being now in circumstances to maintain an amanuensis, but obliged to make use of any hand that came next to write his verses as he made them, it is really wonderful that he should have the spirit to undertake such a work, and much more that he should ever bring it to perfection."

At this time he addressed a beautiful Latin letter to his friend Peter Heimbach, a German, of which the following is Hayley's translation:—

"If, among so many funerals of my countrymen, in a year so full of pestilence and sorrow, you were induced, as you say, by rumour to believe that I also was snatched away, it is not surprising; and if such a rumour prevailed among those of your nation, as it seems to have done, because they were solicitous for my health, it is not unpleasing; for I must esteem it as a proof of their benevolence towards me. But by the

\* See Ellwood's 'Autobiography,' and see T. Warton's character of this book in Todd, i. 187.

graciousness of God, who had prepared for me a safe retreat in the country, I am still alive and well ; and, I trust, not utterly an unprofitable servant, whatever duty in life there yet remains for me to fulfil. That you remember me after so long an interval in our correspondence, gratifies me exceedingly ; though, by the politeness of your expression, you seem to afford me room to suspect that you have rather forgotten me, since, as you say, you admire in me so many different virtues wedded together. From so many weddings I should assuredly dread a family too numerous, were it not certain that in narrow circumstances, and under severity of fortune, virtues are most excellently reared and most flourishing. Yet one of these said virtues has not very handsomely rewarded me for entertaining her ; for that which you call my political virtue, and which I should rather wish you to call my devotion to my country, (enchancing me with her captivating name,) almost, if I may say so, expatriated me. Other virtues, however, join their voices to assure me that wherever we prosper in rectitude, there is our country. In ending my letter, let me obtain from you this favour ; that if you find any parts of it incorrectly written, and without stops, you will impute it to the boy who writes for me, who is utterly ignorant of Latin, and to whom I am forced (wretchedly enough) to repeat every single letter that I dictate. I still rejoice that your merit as an accomplished man, whom I knew as a youth of the highest expectation, has

advanced you so far in the honourable favour of your prince. For your prosperity in every other point you have both my wishes and my hopes. Farewell."

"London, August 26th, 1666."

## CHAPTER XV.

## MILTON'S CONTEMPORARIES.—

‘PARADISE REGAINED’ AND ‘SAMSON AGONISTES.’

ON 27th April, 1667, Milton sold his ‘Paradise Lost’ to Samuel Simmons for an immediate payment of five pounds; another five pounds to be paid on the sale of thirteen hundred copies of the first edition; a third five pounds on the sale of the same number of the second edition; and the same sum after an equal sale of the third edition;—each edition not to exceed fifteen hundred copies. In two years the poet recovered the second payment: he did not live to receive the other payments: therefore 2800 copies had not been sold in seven years.

Johnson and others contend that the sale of thirteen hundred copies in two years, in these times, was a proof that the poet’s merit was not unfelt. I do not think so. John Dennis observes in a passage of his ‘Familiar Letters,’ quoted by Mitford, that “never any poet left a greater reputation behind him than Mr. Cowley, while Milton remained obscure and known but to few; but the great reputation of Cowley did not continue half

a century, and Milton's is now on the pinnacle of the Temple of Fame."

Mitford enumerates the following poets as contemporary with Milton:—"Waller, Suckling, Crashaw, Denham, Lovelace, Brome, Sherborne, Fanshaw, Davenant, besides others of inferior note." He might have added—Habingdon, Stanley, Carew, Herbert, Withers. But none of these were of any mark, or power of invention, unless Cowley and Davenant. It does continue to appear to me extraordinary, that so many false and petty beauties should start up successively to be the temporary fashion of poetry. Invention is not improbability: it is to embody and bring before others the spirits of the past and the absent; it is not the trick of flowery or sparkling language: but the busy-bodies of a nation,—they who give the tone in society, having no natural taste or feeling,—require artificial stimulants. The Court of Charles II. was too much adulterated to endure the spiritual grandeur of Milton: he would have dispelled all the delusions of the wicked magician of voluptuousness: his sternness, his haughty wisdom, his unbending dogmas, were to them terrible and revolting.

At the same time, though the exalted bard was little noticed by the "fashionable world," or by popular authors, we cannot suppose that he found no readers. That class of learned men, who were now thrown into the shade—the republican party,—must have remembered and admired Milton's zeal in their cause, and have had the curiosity to

read his poem; but perhaps in silence and obscurity.

Dryden, too, though of so different a genius and taste, as well as politics, was fully sensible of the poet's merit. In the Preface to his 'State of Innocence,' soon after Milton's death, he says, "I cannot, without injury to the deceased author of 'Paradise Lost,' but acknowledge that this poem has received its entire foundation, part of the design, and many of the ornaments from him. What I have borrowed will be so easily discerned from my mean productions, that I shall not need to point the reader to the places; and truly I should be sorry, for my own sake, that any one should take the pains to compare them together; the original being undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems, which either this age or nation has produced."

Other notices are collected by Todd, which it is not necessary to repeat.

In 1688 appeared a folio edition of the 'Paradise Lost,' under the patronage of Lord Somers: in 1695 appeared a third folio edition, with the learned commentary of Patrick Hume.

In 1670 appeared the poet's 'History of England,' carried down to the Norman Conquest; which was mutilated by the licenser, by striking out passages which have since been recovered and replaced.

In 1671 were published the 'Paradise Regained' and 'Samson Agonistes.' It is said that Milton was mortified at finding that the former

was considered inferior to the 'Paradise Lost.' It is inferior because it has less invention; but, in many of the sublime merits of the last, not at all inferior: there is more of human interest in it. Nor is the 'Samson Agonistes' the production of a less vigorous and majestic genius.

The 'Paradise Regained' is supposed to have been planned or begun at Chalfont. Ellwood having called on the poet after his return to London, was shown by him this poem, with the remark, "This is owing to you; for you put it into my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont." He is said to have written it in a state of uninterrupted fervor, according to the spirit which he names as inherent in him, in a letter to his friend Deodate, September 2nd, 1637:—

"It is my way to suffer no impediment, no love of ease, no avocation whatever, to chill the ardour, to break the continuity, or divert the completion of my literary pursuits."

In several passages of the 'Samson Agonistes' the poet is supposed to allude to his own feelings and fate, especially in these lines, beginning at v. 75:—

I, dark in light, exposed  
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse, and wrong,  
Within doors or without, still as a fool,  
In power of others, never in my own;  
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.  
O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse  
Without all hope of day! &c.

Hayley says, "In these lines the poet seems to

paint himself. The litigation of his will produced a collection of evidence relating to the testator, which renders the discovery of those long-forgotten papers peculiarly interesting: they show very forcibly, and in new points of view, his domestic infelicity and his amiable disposition. The tender and sublime poet, whose sensibility and sufferings were so great, appears to have been almost as unfortunate in his daughters as the Lear of Shakspeare. A servant declares in evidence, that her deceased master, a little before his last marriage, had lamented to her the ingratitude and cruelty of his children: he complained that they combined to defraud him in the economy of his house, and sold several of his books in the basest manner. His feelings on such an outrage, both as a parent and a scholar, must have been singularly painful; perhaps they suggested to him these very pathetic lines."

Dunster adds, that, "as it appears, from the latest discoveries relating to the domestic life of Milton, that his wife was particularly attentive to him, and treated his infirmities with much tenderness, this passage seems to restrict the time when this drama was written to a period previous to his last marriage, or at least nearly to that immediate time while the singular ill-treatment of his daughters was fresh in his memory." This also coincides with what Mr. Hayley observed respecting its being written immediately after the execution of Sir Henry Vane, which took place June 14th, 1662. Milton was then in his fifty-fourth year,



in which\* we are told he married his third wife. This would make the 'Samson Agonistes' at least three years prior to the 'Paradise Regained;' of which we know he had not thought previous to the summer of 1665.

In that magnificent passage beginning at l. 667,—

God of our fathers! what is man,  
That thou towards him with hand so various,  
Or might I say contrarious,  
Temper'st thy providence through his short course,  
Not evenly, as thou rulest  
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,  
Irrational and brute?  
Nor do I name of men the common rout,  
That wandering loose about,  
Grow up and perish, as the summer-fly,  
Heads without name, no more remember'd;  
But such as thou hast solemnly elected,  
With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd,  
To some great work, thy glory,  
And people's safety, which in part they effect.  
Yet towards these thus dignified, thou oft,  
Amidst their highth of noon,  
Changest thy countenance, and thy hand, with no regard  
Of highest favours past  
From thee on them, or them to thee of service.

Nor only dost degrade them, or remit  
To life obscured, which were a fair dismissal;  
But throw'st them lower than thou didst exalt them high,  
Unseemly falls in human eye,  
Too grievous for the trespass or omission;  
Oft leavest them to the hostile sword  
Of heathen and profane, their carcasses  
To dogs and fowls a prey, or else captived;  
Or to the unjust tribunals, under change of times,  
And condemnation of the ingrateful multitude.

\* Not till 1665.

If these they 'scape, perhaps in poverty  
 With sickness and disease thou bow'st them down,  
 Painful diseases and deform'd,  
 In crude old age;  
 Though not disordinate, yet causeless suffering  
 The punishment of dissolute days : in fine,  
 Just or unjust alike seem miserable,  
 For oft alike both come to evil end ;—

Bishop Newton says, that, in speaking of the unjust tribunals, Milton reflected on the trials and sufferings of his party after the Restoration; and that when he talks of poverty, this was his own case; he escaped with life, but lived in poverty; and though he was always very sober and temperate, yet he was much afflicted with the gout, and other “painful diseases in crude old age,”—when he was not yet a very old man.

“But,” Newton adds, “Milton was the most heated enthusiast of his time: speaking of Charles the First's murder, in his ‘Defence of the People of England,’ he says, ‘*Quanquam ego hæc divino potius instinctu gesta esse crediderim, quoties memoriâ repeto,*’ ” &c.

The poet goes on :—

Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn  
 His labours, for thou canst, to peaceful end.

“These concluding verses,” says Hayley, “of this beautiful chorus appear to me particularly affecting, from the persuasion that Milton, in composing them, addressed the last two immediately to Heaven, as a prayer for himself. If the conjecture of this application be just, we may add, that never was the prevalence of a righteous

prayer more happily conspicuous; and let me here remark, that, however various the opinions of men may be concerning the merits or demerits of Milton's political character, the integrity of his heart appears to have secured to him the favour of Providence; since it pleased the Giver of all good not only to turn his labour to a peaceful end, but to irradiate his declining life with the most abundant portion of those pure and sublime mental powers, for which he had constantly and fervently prayed, as the choicest bounty of Heaven."

Again, Hayley thinks that at l. 759 Milton alludes to his own connubial infelicity, and regret for his forgiveness at the repentance of his first wife, suspicious of its sincerity.

But it is not only to the unhappiness of his marriage that Milton alludes in this stern poem: he also renews his political prejudices at l. 1418.

Lords are lordliest in their wine,  
And the well-feasted priest then soonest fired  
With zeal, if aught religion seem concern'd;  
No less the people on their holydays  
Impetuous, insolent, &c.

Warton observes that he here expresses his contempt of a nobility and an opulent clergy, that is, lords both spiritual and temporal, who by no means coincided with his levelling and narrow principles of republicanism and Calvinism, and whom he tacitly compares with the lords and priests of the idol Dagon.

There can be no doubt that the whole of this poem arose out of the state of Milton's personal

feelings at the Restoration. It is the blaze of a mind as gigantic as Samson's form and strength. His imagination is every where on fire both with intellectual and material visions. A vulgar taste in poetry would call the nakedness of his language prosaic : but in the enthusiasm of forceful thought the petty ornaments of language are disregarded. It is in the exaltation of the soul, in belief, in visionary presence, that high poetry consists.

We are bound to contemplate the bard in these lofty moods ;—to think how his spirit rose above his unprosperous and painful situation ;—and with what sublime images, sentiments, and reflections, he soothed himself !—How he glowed when he imagined Samson pulling down destruction on the heads of his foes !—His vigorous and enthusiastic mind roused him to be thus ready to devote himself to the common ruin.

Though now retired, neglected, and subject to many stings of disappointment, I doubt not he was altogether happier than when his mere memory, observation, and judgment were occupied in the coarse conflict of practical affairs. Imagination is more gratifying than memory, and idealism than reality. It is difficult to conceive how so creative a mind could so long bend itself to the servile office of secretaryship : to find correctness of expression in a dead language for diplomatic communications was but a pedantic employment ; and a waste of powers which ought only to have been applied to the highest intellectual exertions.

It is clear, however, that by whatever arguments the poet might reconcile himself to his blindness, there were moments when he felt most bitterly the deprivation: the passages I have cited from 'Samson Agonistes' prove this. In his poverty he could not employ a skilful and learned amanuensis, who could take down his expressions with facility: the aid and consolation of books, except at the mercy of others, were shut to him. He grieved for the loss of that outward view of the face of nature in which he had delighted: he could no longer roam alone at his own will amid the woods and forests and green fields: he sat of a sunny morning in his house-porch, enjoying the fresh air; but this was in a suburb of the great city, in a confined garden: the freedom of limb, the exhilaration of boundary exercise, the breasting of the blowing wind, the change of the fresh breeze, which varies with each contending step, were not his!

O, dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon!

All was blank, and every footstep was feeble and tottering, and at the mercy of another. We perceive that after a life of such high virtue as he was conscious that he had led, there were bitter hours when he thought this fate hard. As his endowments were sublime, so were his expectations lofty: his temper was naturally scornful; and as he could himself do mighty things, so perhaps he demanded more of others than they could well perform. He had not descended to a mi-

nute observance of all the flexibilities, ductilities, and windings of the human character: he did not forgive or consider its littlenesses, its petty passions, and mean and ignorant thoughts.

It seems to me to be a biographer's duty thus to analyse the character of a great man, if it be done with a conscientious desire of explaining the truth. Mere facts, uncommented on, are neither interesting nor instructive: better omit the comment than do it frivolously or affectedly; still less, maliciously. I myself have no doubt that the poet was wrong in his political opinions; but I have still less doubt that he was strictly conscientious in them. To call in question the sincerity of his protestations and aspirations,—his magnificent effusions of holy hope and enthusiasm,—would be not only stupid, but wicked.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## MILTON'S DEATH.

THERE are certain minor points which it is very useful to ascertain, but which, when once established, do not require to be repeated; such are many of the particulars verified with the most exemplary labour by Todd. If any thing were wanting, Mitford has gone over the ground again with acute and discriminate taste and judgment: a poet himself, of deep feeling, and eloquent originality.

I will however just mention, that the poet did not entirely abandon literary production after having published the two magnificent poems last noticed. In 1672 he put forth his '*Artis Logicæ Plenior Institutio*;' and in 1673 his '*Treatise of True Religion, Heresy,*' &c.

In the year of his death he published his '*Familiar Letters in Latin,*' with some '*Academical Exercises.*'

In the preceding year he reprinted his '*Juvenile Poems,*' with additions, among which is the '*Tractate on Education,*' published in 1644.

His health now gave way fast, and his fits of the gout became violent; but such was the firmness of his mind, that Aubrey says, even in the paroxysms of this fell disease, "he would be very cheerful, and sing." He died quietly at his house in Bunhill-fields, on Sunday, November 8th, 1674; wanting only a month of completing his sixty-sixth year. Thus departed the greatest epic poet of England,—and, in my opinion, of any country or age. He was buried near his father, in the chancel of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

His person was beautiful in youth, but his face too delicate: he was of middle height, active, and a good swordsman; temperate in his food, and all his habits of life, except in study, in which he indulged to excess even from his childhood. His evenings were usually passed in music and conversation: his chief time of composition appears to have been the night; and by the aid of a most retentive memory, he dictated in the morning to an amanuensis what he had thus composed.

His biographers say that he was of an equal and placid temper: but this is not the character given by Mrs. Powell, the mother of his first wife; who, however, was an angry and prejudiced witness. Todd has printed a full account of his nuncupative will, which was first discovered by T. Warton, and which, being contested, furnishes several curious particulars of his domestic habits. He had an humble establishment, consisting of two maid-servants and a man-servant: he dined



usually in his kitchen.\* He never was a man of worldly ostentation, and always despised money: he seems to have been stern to his daughters, and exacted too much from them; they accordingly did not steadily love him. It must have been an irksome task to them to read to him in languages which they did not understand.

As to the poet's religious tenets, a treatise has been lately recovered from the State-Paper Office, which has made a great noise among the theologists: the title is, '*De Doctrina Christiana, ex Sacris duntaxat Libris petita, Disquisitionum Libri duo posthumi.*' The late King put it into the hands of Dr. Sumner, (now Bishop of Winchester,) to be edited and translated. It is said that the poet, being dissatisfied with the *Bodies of Divinity* then published, was thus induced to compile one for himself. This treatise is considered to prove that Milton was finally an Arian. It is calmly and moderately written; not with the animosity of a controversialist, but it wants the author's former or usual recondite learning and argumentative force.

Bishop Burgess, considering that this work disproves the poet's orthodoxy, has disputed its genuineness;† but it is generally admitted that its authenticity cannot be doubted.‡ This extra-

\* This was long afterwards, in Geneva, the custom of the highest and most opulent Genevan families. See Picot, '*Histoire de Genève.*'

† 8vo. 1826.

‡ See discussions on Milton's tenets here let out, in '*Edin-*

ordinary treatise contains many singular opinions, which none but theologists will take the trouble to discuss.\*

Milton left three daughters:—Anne, who was deformed, and died in childbed; Mary, who died single; and Deborah, who married Abraham Clarke, a weaver in Spitalfields, and died, aged seventy-six, in August, 1727. Her daughter married Thomas Foster, also a weaver in Spitalfields, and died at Islington, May 9th, 1754, in her sixty-sixth year.†

Sir Christopher Milton, the poet's only brother, was knighted and made a judge by James II., but soon retired from the bench. He retired to Ipswich, and afterwards to the village of Rushmere, about two miles distant, where he died; and was buried in the church of St. Nicholas, Ipswich, March 22nd, 1692. He left children.‡

Milton had also two nephews by his sister Philips,—John Philips and Edward Philips, both authors.§

burgh Review,' No. cvii, September, 1831; and see Mitford's note, 'Life,' p. cx.

\* See the American, Dr. Channing's 'Remarks on the Character and Writings of Milton.'

† Sir James Mackintosh found the last descendant of Milton parish-clerk at Madras.

‡ See Pedigrees of Knights made by Charles II. and James II., collected by De Neve, inter Mss. Brit. Mus.

§ See their lives by Godwin. See also 'Theatrum Poetarum,' Canterbury, 1800, and again Geneva, 1824.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## GENERAL AND MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS.

I NOW come to general observations on the poet's character and genius: of these I have already intermixed some in the course of the narrative: if I recur to any of the same opinions and reflections, although in other words, I must crave the reader's indulgence.

Of this "greatest of great men" the private traits and whole life were congenial to his poetry. Men of narrow feelings will say that his political writings contradict this congeniality. His politics were, no doubt, violent and fierce; but it cannot be doubted that they were conscientious. He lived at a crisis of extraordinary public agitation, when all the principles of government were moved to their very foundations, and when there was a general desire to commence institutions *de novo*.

) In his early poems there are occasional passages which show his taste for monarchical and aristocratic manners; for the pomp of the state and the church; for the glories of chivalry and the feudal system; for the halls of "knights and barons

bold;" for the music and the solemn gloom of magnificent cathedrals :—

the high-embowed roof,  
With antic pillars massy-proof ;  
And storied windows, richly dight,  
Casting a dim religious light.  
There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voiced quire below,  
In service high and anthems clear, &c.—

Il Penseroso.

Milton's imagination was not at all suited to the cold and dry hypocrisy of a Puritan ; but his gigantic mind gave him a temper that spurned at all authority. This was his characteristic through life : it showed itself in every thought and every action, both public and private, from his earliest youth ; except that he did not appear to rebel against parental authority ; for nothing is more beautiful than his mild and tender expostulation to his father, in that exquisite Latin address which has been quoted.

{His great poems require such a stretch of mind in the reader, as to be almost painful} The most amazing copiousness of learning is sublimated into all his conceptions and descriptions. His learning never oppressed his imagination ; and his imagination never obliterated or dimmed his learning : but even these would not have done, without the addition of a great heart and a pure and lofty mind.

{That mind was given up to study and meditation from his boyhood till his death : he had no

taste for the vulgar pleasures of life ; he was all spiritual. But he loved fame enthusiastically, and was ready to engage in the great affairs of public business ; and when he did engage, performed his part with industry, skill, and courage. Courage, indeed, mingled, in a prominent degree, among his many other mighty and splendid qualities.)

Who is equal to analyse a mind so rich, so powerful, so exquisite ?

I do not think that tenderness was his characteristic ; and he was, above all other men, unyielding. His softer sensibilities were rather reflective than instantaneous : his sentiments came from his imagination, rather than his imagination from his sentiments.†

The vast fruits of his mind always resulted from complex ingredients ; though they were so amalgamated, that with him they became simple in their effects. It is impossible now to trace the processes of his intellect. We cannot tell what he would have been without study ; but we know that he must have been great under any circumstances, though his greatness might have been of a different kind.

‡ He made whatever he gathered from others his own ; he only used it as an ingredient for his own combinations.‡

\* His earliest study seems to have been the holy writings ; they first fed his fancy with the imagery of eastern poetry ; and no where could he have found so sublime a nutriment. But what is any

nutriment to him who cannot taste, digest, and be nourished? It depends not upon the force and excellence of what is conveyed; but upon the power of the recipient: it is, almost all, inborn genius, though it may be under the influence of some small modification from discipline.

However great and wonderful Milton was, there were some points in which both Spenser and Shakspeare exceeded him; because in those points nature had been more favourable to them. Probably both Spenser and Shakspeare were more ductile to the world. Milton was stern, solitary, unbending, contemptuous, proud, yet unostentatious. With his disposition and taste, he was little observant of the minor manners and characters of society: he was always thoughtful, inflexible, and abstracted. † Loftiness of musing was the sphere in which he lived: his books were his companions; his imagination surrounded him with another and a spiritual world. |

Providence has endowed us with the power to conceive what is more magnificent and more beautiful than that which the material world exhibits. We know not why—it is among the mysteries of the Almighty.

If he who nurses these spiritualities is at the same time a materialist in action, then we may doubt the good of them: but assuredly Milton was not guilty of this inconsistency. Read all his earnest and eloquent professions of innocence; and who can hesitate to give credit to them? His controversial opponents have attempted to throw

dirt upon him, but have not succeeded. He provoked the most bitter hostility; yet no immorality could be fastened upon him. |

Allowing the poet to have been harsh and choleric, yet the sanctity of his disposition and character appears to me demonstrative. I can reconcile this with his severe politics, though those seem, certainly, not very merciful.

Superficial minds, affecting the tone of wisdom, hold out that the gifts of the Muse are incompatible with serious business. Milton, the greatest of poets, affords a crushing answer to this. | In the flower of his manhood, and through middle age, he was a statist, and active man of executive affairs in a crisis of unexampled difficulty and danger. His controversial writings, both in politics and divinity, are solid, vigorous, original, and practical, and yet he could return at last to the highest flights of the Muse, undamped and undimmed.

The lesson of his life is one of the most instructive that biography affords: it shows what various and dissimilar powers may be united in the same person, and what a grandeur of moral principles may actuate the human heart; but at the same time it shows how little all these combined talents and virtues can secure the due respect and regard of contemporaries. It is absurd to deny that Milton was neglected during his life, and that his unworldlimindedness let the meanest of the people mount over his head. He lived poor, and for the most part in obscurity. Even high employments

in the state seem to have obtained him no luxuries, and few friends or acquaintance : no brother poets flocked round him ; none praised him, though in the habit of flattering each other.

(The poet, indeed, might have been employed more consistently with his sublime genius than in political and theological controversy. He lost nineteen precious years of his middle life in those irritating occupations, from the age of thirty-two to fifty-one : after that age, he occupied the remaining fourteen years of his life principally in poetry.) His controversies had not sullied his imagination, nor affected the sanctity of his thoughts, language, or temper :—I mean, after these degrading labours ceased ; for, while busy in them, they must have necessarily embittered his feelings and lowered his mind. ¶ It is melancholy to think how much of grand invention, which he might in those long years have put forth, has been lost to the world ;

I do not say that the writings which during that period he did put forth have been entirely useless ; but they were beneath Milton's best powers, and might probably have been executed by inferior talents. I here suppose them excellent in their department and unmixed with mischief ; but this is more than can be conceded positively to them. \ The notions of republicanism are assuredly carried too far ; and nothing can be more dangerous than to resist all authority, and call in question all ancient institutions.¶

If intellect is the grand glory of man, Milton



stands pre-eminent above all other human beings; above Homer, Virgil, Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, Spenser, and Shakspeare! To the highest grandeur of invention upon the sublimest subject he unites the greatest wisdom and learning, and the most perfect art. Almost all other poets sink into twinkling stars before him. What has issued from the French school of poetry seems to be the production of an inferior order of beings, and in this I include even our Dryden and Pope; for I cannot place these two famous men among the greatest poets: they may be among the first of a secondary class.

It is easy to select fine passages from minor poetical authors; but a great poet must be tried by his entirety,—by the uniform texture of his web.

{Milton has a language of his own; I may say, invented by himself. It is somewhat hard, but it is all sinew: it is not vernacular, but has a latinized cast, which requires a little time to reconcile a reader to it. It is best fitted to convey his own magnificent ideas: its very learnedness impresses us with respect: it moves with a gigantic step: it does not flow, like Shakspeare's style, nor dance, like Spenser's. Now and then there are transpositions somewhat alien to the character of the English language, which is not well-calculated for transposition; but in Milton this is perhaps a merit, because his lines are pregnant with deep thought and sublime imagery, which require us to dwell upon them, and contemplate them

over and over. He ought never to be read rapidly : his is a style which no one ought to imitate till he is endowed with a soul like Milton's. His ingredients of learning are so worked into his original thoughts that they form a part of them ; they are never patches.†

One would wish to present to oneself the mental and moral character of Milton even from his childhood. Probably he was absorbed in himself, and by no means ductile ; lonely in his pleasures, uncompanionable, and seemingly sullen ; angry when interrupted in his books ; satirical or contemptuous at frivolous conversation ; contradictory when roused, and hardy when answered : estimated doubtfully by his father ; sometimes praised ; sometimes raising high expectations ; sometimes causing fear, and even anger and remonstrance.

Genius will never be dictated to ; and few observers can distinguish this repugnance from an obstinate and dull indocility. They, on the contrary, who are quick to apprehend, but who have no ideas of their own, take things rapidly and without resistance.

One should like to imagine the difference of early character, habits, sentiments, pursuits, conduct and temper, between Milton and Gray ; both sons of men following the same calling, both living in the bustle of the city, and both addicted to literary occupations. There was this primary difference, that Milton had a good father, and Gray a bad one.

Milton was probably more stern; Gray more tender and morbid: } Milton more confident and aspiring; } Gray more fearful and hopeless. Each loved books and learning, and each had an exquisite taste. Milton was more vigorous; Gray more nice. Both were imaginative and fond of romantic fiction; but } Milton was more enterprising. } Gray's fastidiousness impeded him; he was

A puny insect, shivering at a breeze.

Milton was dauntless, defiant, and, when insulted, fierce; perhaps ferocious: nothing shook his self-reliance. Gray was driven back even by a frown.

The "Elegiac Bard" might have done tenfold more than he did if he had been more courageous, but could never have done what Milton has done: he had not the same invention, nor the same natural sublimity. Milton was far the happier being, though he engaged in controversies which Gray's peaceful spirit would have avoided. } Milton was a practical statesman; } Gray would have been utterly unfit to engage in affairs of state.

Gray's spirits were partly broke by the unprincipled and brutal conduct of his father to his mother; but they were naturally low: his inborn sensitiveness amounted to disease. He seems to have been more delicate and precise in his classical scholarship, and more exact in all his knowledge; but it was not so mingled up with original thought, and therefore not so valuable: his memory was often mere memory, and therefore was exact. This did not arise from inability, but from timidity and indolence: he lived in the solemn

and monotonous cloisters of a college; he had nothing of the ordinary movements of life to excite him: all the faculties of his mind, therefore, except his memory, were often stagnant. The memory works best when the passions are least moved.

The dim misty grey hues of vacant despondence will chill the lips and palsy the voice. Who fears the ridicule or censure of men, but anticipates not the cheer of triumph, will want the sources of energy and enterprise. The blood must glow in the veins, and the heart must dance, to enable us to do great things.

We cannot doubt that this was the case with Milton: many noble passages regarding himself in his prose works prove it: he nursed glorious and holy hopes from his childhood. Afterwards, in the midst of the foulest calumnies, he was undaunted and undismayed. Even in the most perilous times, when the ban of proscription and the sword of death were hanging over his head, he conceived and partly composed his 'Paradise Lost.' He had a spring of soul which nothing could relax.

Magnanimity grows strong by opposition and difficulty; and when a difficulty is conquered, the energy is doubled: no one knows what powers are in him till he is pressed: when they come out from pressure, hope and confidence come with them. It is not till after we have been tried that we trust to ourselves: then we stand unmoved by the blast, and laugh at the storm. All genuine

power grows more vigorous after it has been tried.

Thousands go down to the grave, unconscious of the native faculties, which, if exercised, might have distinguished them : but buried faculties are an incumbrance, and breed diseases ; and it cannot be doubted that this was one of the maladies of Gray. Milton was never to be silenced : the fire within found vent ; and then his great heart was at ease, and triumphed.

There was not the same force and depth in his early Latin poems, as in his early English : this perhaps arose from the constraint of writing in a foreign and dead language. He was compelled to look to models ; and whatever merits the ancient classic poets have, they have not the sombre tone and colouring, and the picturesque imaginativeness, which began in the Italian school with Dante. Of that school, Milton was the noblest and most inborn scholar : in some of his earliest English verses he caught Dante's magnificent darkness, his mystical images, his spiritual visions.

Milton is never an empty dealer in words ; it is always the thought, the sentiment, the image, which impels him to speak : it breathes ; it throws forth the raciness of life. His earliest poems travel out of the track of mere observation, and explore the spiritual world. He ventures among miracles, and hears aerial voices, and rises among the choirs of angels. In any but the most sublime genius it would have been rash hardihood to have entered so early on such unearthly sub-

jects. He has acquitted himself with the vigour of the most matured age.

If the 'Hymn on the Nativity' was a college exercise, its original force is the more extraordinary, because he was under the surveillance of technical judges; and nothing but a master-genius could have emboldened him to take his own peculiar course. How those to whom it was addressed must have stared, when they compared it with the creeping, feeble, lame, colloquial, trite compositions, which surrounded it! They must have started, half annoyed, half doubting, half delighted against their will, half shrinking at what they suspected to be rebellious audacity; half recollecting models; then beginning to think that the young poet had found out a new language, but whispering to themselves that heresies from admitted models ought to be discouraged.

The example was not followed; no one caught the tone: probably it was found too difficult to assume. No one had the genius, or the force, or the taste, to achieve it. The first edition of the 'Juvenile Poems' appeared in 1645; no other was called for for nearly thirty years.

It is wilful misrepresentation therefore to say that these poems received much notice from Milton's contemporaries: they are far above the taste of his age, or perhaps of the immediate popular taste of any age. Common readers love common passions, and the images which are familiar to them: they like practical observations upon actual daily life, and witticisms upon their neighbours, rivals, and superiors.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## OBSERVATIONS ON MILTON'S POETRY CONTINUED.

MILTON lived in a time perhaps more propitious to poetry than even the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Superstition, chivalry, and romance, had begun to abate; but philosophy and reason had commenced their influence, without checking imagination. The times were stirring; and such times are propitious to the Muse. The public mind began to let itself loose from old chains.

From the days of the Restoration there has been no poetical freedom of mind; unless in our own latter days.

The counteraction to the favourableness I have spoken of, was the metaphysical taste introduced by King James. That monarch had no imagination, but a ridiculous pedantry. Talents of a secondary nature, which were the slaves of example, might bow to this; but bad models would not repel genius, while it could choose its own.

The language had not yet arrived at fastidiousness: the picturesque energies of feudal chivalry were not forgotten, nor had their influence over

the imagination entirely ceased : they were enough in the belief of the people to be capable of being recalled. The drama had arrived at great force of excellence, though mixed with many irregularities.

The ranks and characters of society were yet distinctly marked. There was luxury and polish, without effeminacy : learning had not yet exhausted itself : if the Court was corrupt, it was not yet frivolous. There was enthusiasm of loyalty, and enthusiasm of rebellion.

The age of Elizabeth was imaginative and romantic, but not classical : the age of James was pedantic : the age of Charles was fitted for a sober heroism.

Milton had the encouragement of foreigners for his early Latin poetry, which received their high praise when he travelled into Italy. Gray, equally eminent by similar compositions about the same age, did not exhibit to them his talents in this department : if he had received the same approbation, it would not have given him the same confidence. One was all buoyancy, the other all depression : one had received his father's encouragement, the other his father's blight : one had vowed himself to glory, the other was too timid to think of it.

Of modern poets, Gray's epithets are perhaps most picturesque ; but they do not unite with them visionariness, like Milton's. Examine the 'Elegy in the Churchyard : ' they are all pictures of material realities. All the descriptions in that



beautiful poem are merely such as a curious and tasteful eye could derive from observation only ; there is no invention.

In all the descriptive poems of Milton there is rich and wonderful invention. The combinations in 'Lycidas' are strikingly inventive : this is one of its marked features, and gives it that passion which shows itself in the excitement of the mind. There is a hurry of ideas ; a conflict of lamentations and consolations.

In almost all the contemporary poetry there is flatness, lameness, and mean colloquiality : a high tone is never uniformly sustained : strong words are mixed with weak, and one half of a line falls from the other : in some, there is a feeble, thin, and conversational diffusion ; as in old George Wither. It is sustainment which is Milton's characteristic excellence : single good lines may be found in his predecessors. His strains are closely wrought, and every where with the golden thread ; with grand images, and noble combinations of design.

Milton lived for the Muse ; he vowed himself to the Muse. He professed it ; he did not pretend to speak of it as a mere idle amusement, as if he was half ashamed of it : he knew its worth, its dignity, and its difficulties. No one wanting enthusiasm ever succeeded in this vocation : its purposes cannot be effected by doubtful spirits and faint hopes. Gray affected to write merely as an occasional amusement, and not to make a business of it : this affectation was beneath a great mind.

Spenser is allegorical throughout ; Milton is only occasionally allegorical. Spenser is the poet of chivalry ; Milton is the poet of the Bible. Milton therefore is not properly romantic, nor a poet risen out of the feudal ages. He addresses himself to all nations, all ages, all manners,—all mankind : he has indeed many casts of words, and many images derived from the compositions which originated with the Troubadours ; and he would not have been what he is, unless Dante and the Italian school had preceded him. Milton was a massy “ cloth of gold,” while others were a slight fabric of slight materials.

Part of Dante’s grandeur lies in a mystical brevity peculiar to himself. Milton sketches out his figures more fully and clearer ; yet they are more difficult to sketch, because they are above humanity : whereas Dante most alludes to human characters, and their conduct on earth. This alone proves the superiority of Milton over Dante : but then Dante lived in a darker age, when the revival of learning was in its infancy : Milton had many great examples of poetical fiction before him.

Beautiful and rich as Spenser is, Milton has taken little of his cast : there is not much similarity in their language, and none in their rhythm : their fictions are of different materials, and in different forms. Milton had always a predilection for sacred subjects : he seems to have turned more to the dramatists for expression and sentiment, and even imagery ; Shakspeare especially, Ben Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher. That

Sylvester was such a favourite, must be accounted for by impressions made upon his childhood.

Milton seems always to have kept aloof in his holiness : he thus did not suffer his mind to be diluted by vulgar thoughts. The effect of his deep meditations and studies was never broken in upon. He kept up his dignity, his self-esteem, and the pride and ambition of his calling. By mingling much with the world we catch its petty passions, and lower ourselves to its tone and temperament. The facts which have been handed down to us of his life, accord well with the character of his writings : he was fearless, and this added to his strength : a timid hand will never strike out noble notes.

If it could be proved that there is no virtue or sound sense in spirituality ; that we can rely on nothing but the material objects presented to our view ; then poetry would be an empty, un instructive, and even delusive amusement ; but I presume that they who attempt to set up such a philosophy will incur the disgrace of its meanness and its falsehood. All the charms and almost all the virtues of our being are spiritual. Nature has implanted in us the delight of looking to something beyond actual existences ; and in gratifying this delight lies the magic of poetry. That poetry which does not attempt and perform this, scarcely deserves the name. Above all others, unless perhaps Shakspeare, Milton has performed it. What exquisite idealism and inventiveness there is in ‘Comus!’

But let no one mistake the fantastic for the inventive : this, instead of being a proof of genius, is proof of the want of it : yet the great vulgar, as well as the little vulgar, mistake one for the other. Charlatans in criticism consider that the mark of poetical invention is improbability, or impossibility : on this principle Homer and Virgil were minor poets. To bring the past to life is a primary purpose of poetry : this is true invention ; not to describe forms merely, but mind and spirit, and internal movement. The power is in proportion to the dignity and grand characters of the actors brought into play : thus Milton rises not only to the height of humanity, but of angels good and bad, the obedient and the rebellious. What must have been the force and splendour of an imagination which could duly conceive and paint such beings ! The excellence is in proportion as truth and probability are preserved in lofty creations. If this be the test, then what other poet can contend with Milton ? Homer and Virgil have drawn heroes, but they were merely men : their imaginations have not risen to the wars of ethereal beings, and battles with the Almighty. And even in the softer scenes of mere human passions and enjoyments, how superior are Adam and Eve to all other personifications in poetry !

It has been objected that the subject is too lofty and solemn for human sympathy ;—a tasteless and absurd criticism. Of mere earthly scenery, what can equal the garden of Eden ? Or

are we to have no interest in the description of it because we have lost it? On topics of almost inconceivable grandeur the poet never uses exaggerated language, but is sober, congenial, and speaks with a comprehensive majesty, as if he was master of his mighty subject, and elevated above human intellectuality. Every other bard would have betrayed weakness by inflated language. If he had thought about the minor artifices or ornaments of what is called poetry, he must have soon abandoned his task as beyond the power of human performance. All is in the thought: the plainer the language, the nobler as well as easier the execution. That frivolous adornment, that outward investment of flowers, of which petty artists boast, is mere trickery.

Had Milton taken a subject less divine, a subject from uninspired history, I doubt if he would have executed it with equal success. His own conceptions were too elevated to enter with minuteness into inferior characters: he knew not the feebler passions and little windings of the human heart: he could not draw the vast variety of man's obliquities, like Shakspeare. Whatever we are accustomed to admire in the best of other poets, sinks into paleness and insignificance before the splendour and sublimity of Milton.

But minor poets often fail, not only from want of native force, but because they propose to themselves false objects of excellence: they substitute perverse inventiveness for genuine creation; and too often describe and copy, when they ought to invent. The poet should turn spirituality into

imagery ; but it must not be mere body,—it must have life, and thought, and soul. Milton has given something of material shape to the airy beings of a higher sphere, but he has never divested them of the bright and indefinable radiance of divinity.

There can be no unity in the description of inanimate nature, or in what is didactic ; consequently there can be no perfect invention : it is only therefore in the epic or the dramatic that there can be poetry of the primary class : this will exclude from the first class many of the celebrated poets of our own country.

Looking to human agency, who has constructed with us a long and well-combined narrative of imaginary characters ? If this merely human creation be difficult, what has Milton performed ? How comparatively easy is it to personify and delineate the diversity in the moral and intellectual characters of mankind,—to put it in action amid the scenes of human life, and to show human passions in conflict ! yet how rarely have even these powers been exhibited !

The true poet must create : he must leave artists to illustrate and adorn. Whoever employs himself much in the mechanism of composition, must be deficient in enthusiasm and warmth ; he must feel no inspiration. Language will come of course to him who thinks profoundly, feels deeply, and sees with imaginative brightness. What is brilliant in itself, requires no ornament of paint and colours.

To study Milton's poetry is not merely the de-

light of every accomplished mind, but it is a duty. He who is not conversant with it, cannot conceive how far the genius of the Muse can go. They who have no mirror in their minds to receive and reflect, may be but slightly and dimly touched; but they must let the rays shine upon them, even as the sun falls upon the barren rocks: at some happy moment they may be benefited by the genial beams.

Here are none of the frivolous idlenesses; the wanton sports of imagination; the false voluptuousness; the whimsical fictions; the affected pathos; the sickly whinings; the forced deliriums; the raptures of extravagant words; the feigned melancholy; the morbid musings; the dreamy mistiness of unmeaning verbiage; the echos of echos of artificial sounds. All is pure majesty; the sober strength, the wisdom from above, that instructs and awes. It speaks as an oracle,—not with a mortal voice.

The bard, whatever might have been his inborn genius, could never have attained this height of argument and execution but by a life of laborious and holy preparation;—a constant conversance with the ideas suggested by the Sacred Writings; the habitual resolve to lift his mind and heart above earthly thoughts; the incessant exercise of all the strongest faculties of the intellect; retirement, temperance, courage, hope, faith.

He had all the aids of learning; all the fruit of all the wisdom of ages; all the effect of all that poetic genius, and all that philosophy had

achieved: all were infused and mingled up in his mind with his own native growth. Had his learning been heaped on a mind of less native splendour, it could have produced none of these results: it fell upon a fire, which bore it up into a golden and ethereal flame.

While the gigantic productions of such a mind were in progress, the poet must have felt strong consolations for all his misfortunes, privations, and dangers; but not unmixed, it appears, with some regrets and some complainings. This last we must infer from the passages in 'Samson Agonistes,' already noticed.

Whoever is powerful in virtuous faculties, and exercises them as he ought, must necessarily feel a great and proud delight from the exertion; but in the noble employment of the mind there is unmingled delight: hours become like minutes, and days like hours. Sitting in the humble porch of his humble house, blind, poor, meanly clad, unattended, how great must Milton have felt above all kings and conquerors of the earth,—above the possessors of the wealth of the world, the inhabitants of marble palaces and golden saloons! He knew his own dignity; and it was among his glories that he knew it. He never shrunk from the assertion of his own ascendancy. It did not lower his self-esteem to hear the popular shouts bestowed on his inferiors,—on Waller, and Cowley, and Denham, and the wits that basked in the sunshine of the Court, while he was neglected, and his sublime strains unfelt and untasted: he



knew the day would come when all that was wise and great must acknowledge his supremacy.

Perhaps self-confidence was among his leading traits : if he had been deficient in this quality he would never have performed what he did. It may produce rashness ; where there is innate strength it will produce success. Temerity is better than a chilling and helpless fear : to have power, and not to know it, is worse perhaps than not to have it : whoever depends on the opinions of others, and cannot assert his own cause, is almost sure to be crushed.

Nothing is more useful in literary biography than to endeavour to ascertain by what means others have attained extraordinary excellence : there must always be a concurrence of causes, of which some may perhaps be accidental : the in-born gift is first, and indispensable ; but encouragement, discipline, and toil, are also necessary. It is clear that Milton showed the superiority of his endowments at ten years old ; and all other concurrences would have done nothing without these.

Can any case be shown where true genius did not exhibit itself in early childhood ? It appears to me very improbable. I know no ascertained case. An extreme sensibility is a primary ingredient : this must show itself early. Sometimes common observers have mistaken the symptoms of genius ; but this does not alter the case. Vulgar censors often take the appearances of genius in childhood for folly ; as has been so beautifully described by Beattie, in ' Young Edwin.'

## CHAPTER XIX.

RECAPITULATION OF MILTON'S PERSONAL  
CHARACTER.

I KNOW not that much can be added to the traits of Milton's character which I have already given. As in almost all cases of great genius, there is a consonance in the qualities of the poetry and the poet. Grandeur, inflexibility, sternness, originality, naked force,—all true splendour, or strength, arises from internal conviction or belief.

The poet was never compliant to the ways of the world: from his very childhood he kept himself aloof: he nursed his visions in solitude, and soothed his haughty hopes of future loftiness of fame by lonely musing: the ideal world in which his mind lived would not coalesce with the rude concourse of mankind.

As to his own purity and sanctity of soul, the declarations and enthusiastic apostrophes in his own prose writings render it impossible to doubt it: he made them in the hearing of his most bitter enemies,—public enemies through all Europe,—rendered furious by a common cause, in which all the principles of ancient institutions

were involved. The extent to which he carried his arguments appears to me wrong, and I cannot deem his conclusions other than harsh and vindictive; but, as I have said before, I do not think that tenderness of feeling was his distinction. His gigantic heart was not easily melted into tears: he knew how to paint rebellious angels, mighty even in their defeat.

All his excitements were intellectual: his thoughts were compound: but it is surprising how a mind habituated for twenty years to the coarse routine of public business, could at once throw it all off, and produce a poetical texture so close-wrought, and of such unmingled majesty. Plain as the style is, it never sinks into colloquiality or the language of business: he had kept his genius aloof from his daily occupation, and suffered not the world to blow or breathe upon it.

In the commencement of the ninth book of the 'Paradise Lost' the poet speaks of his subject as more heroic than the subjects of the *Iliad* and *Æneid*:—

If answerable style I can obtain  
Of my celestial patroness, who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplored,  
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires  
Easy my unpremeditated verse,  
Since first this subject for heroic song  
Pleased me, long chusing and beginning late;  
Not sedulous by nature to indite  
Wars, hitherto the only argument  
Heroic deem'd.

So before, in book vii, addressing himself to his Muse Urania, he says:—

Standing on earth, not rapt above the pole,  
 More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged  
 To hoarse or mute : though fall'n on evil days,  
 On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues ;  
 In darkness, and with dangers compass'd round,  
 And solitude : yet not alone, while thou  
 Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn  
 Purples the east. Still govern thou my song,  
 Urania ; and fit audience find, though few.

That his inward light became more radiant from his outward darkness, I cannot doubt. This he expresses himself in the sublime opening of his third book :—

Thee I revisit safe,  
 And feel thy sovereign vital lamp ; but thou  
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain  
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn ;  
 So thick a drop serene hath quench'd their orbs,  
 Or dim suffusion veil'd. Yet not the more  
 Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt,  
 Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill ;  
 Smit with the love of sacred song. But chief  
 Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath,  
 That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,  
 Nightly I visit : nor sometimes forget  
 Those other two equall'd with me in fate,  
 So were I equall'd with them in renown,  
 Blind Thamyrís and blind Mæonides,  
 And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.  
 Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move  
 Harmonious numbers ; as the wakeful bird  
 Sings darkling, and, in shadiest covert hid,  
 Tunes her nocturnal note. Thus with the year  
 Seasons return ; but not to me returns  
 Day, or the sweet approach of eve or morn,  
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine ;  
 But cloud instead, and ever-during dark  
 Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
 Cut off ; and for the book of knowledge fair  
 Presented with an universal blank

Of nature's works, to me expunged and rased,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
So much the rather thou, celestial light,  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate ; there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

There is nothing in all the materials of biography more applicable to an author's character than this affecting and majestic burst of egotism : though it will be repeated in the poetry, I should consider myself worse than tasteless if I omitted to insert it here.

If we do not dwell on these parts of the poet's thoughts and feelings, we pass over his principal and most exalted traits. The metrical writer, whose life is not a poem, is of an inferior class, and a mere poetical artist. No assumed character,—nothing, which does not proceed from “a believing mind,” (to use Collins's expression,) will be efficient. Milton, while he was composing ‘Paradise Lost,’ battled with the angels, and lived in the garden of Eden. While he was dictating the passages I have cited, how unutterably grand must have been the exaltation of his mind !

Great pains have been taken to discover what is called the origin of ‘Paradise Lost.’ Such conjectures may amuse the curious in bibliography ; for higher purposes they are but empty trifles. The great number of authors, to whom it is pretended to track the poet, is alone a proof how little certainty there is in such researches. It appears to me that these critics mistake the

nature of originality. It is not so much in the novelty of the ingredients, as in their selection and new combinations, that originality consists.

In confirmation of what the poet has said of his "long choosing, and beginning late," he thus expresses himself in his second book of the 'Reformation of Church Government, in 1641:—

"Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him towards the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapours of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of some rhyming parasite; nor to be obtained of dame Memory and her siren daughters; but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs."

I am convinced that this is the only true account of the origin of 'Paradise Lost.' Shakspeare's originality might be still more impugned, if an anticipation of hints and similar stories were to be taken as proof of plagiarism. In many of the dramatist's most beautiful plays the whole tale is borrowed, as, for instance, 'Romeo and Juliet' from Luigi da Porto: but Shakspeare and Milton turn brass into gold. This sort of

passage-hunting has been carried a great deal too far, and has disgusted and repelled the reader of feeling and taste. The novelty is in the raciness, the life, the force, the just association, the probability, the truth ; that which is striking because it is extravagant, is a false novelty. He who borrows to make patches is a plagiarist ; but what patch is there in Milton ? All is interwoven, and forms part of one web.

No doubt, the holy bard was always intent upon sacred poetry, and drew his principal inspirations from Scripture. This distinguishes his style and spirit from those of all other poets ; and gives him a solemnity which has not been surpassed save in the Book whence welled that inspiration.

The poem is one which could not have been produced solely by the genius of Milton, without the addition of an equal extent and depth of learning, and an equal labour of reflection. Neither Shakspeare, nor Spenser, nor any other great poet, of any country, could have produced it. It is never an effusion. I conjecture that it was produced slowly, after long musing on each passage ; though he hints otherwise himself. It has always a great compression. Perhaps its perpetual allusions to all past literature and history are sometimes carried a little too far for the popular reader ; and the latinised style requires to be read with the attention due to an ancient classic.

Probably all the author's diversified mental faculties and acquirements worked together in the production of almost every portion of this

majestic edifice. There is nothing of mere simple imagination in any part: all is moral, didactic, wise, sublime, as well as creative and visionary.

All language appears diluted in every other poet, compared with Milton's: it has few transpositions; and is never guilty of flowery ornaments, which vulgar taste mistakes for poetical richness. Serious, profound, devoted, gigantic in conception, and sublime in words, he speaks as an inspired emanation of a higher state of being! There is a sombre awe in him, to which we listen as to an oracle. He dictates, and imposes a force of authority, which we dare not question. We tremble while we believe.

In the Life which I have thus attempted of the most sublime of all English authors, it has not been my purpose to be minute, and to collect together all which had been previously told of the great poet.

It has seemed to me on the present occasion even judicious to adhere to the leading features only; and to give them, not from the representations of others, but from my own feelings, reflections, and convictions. I am afraid that there are many who admire Milton, principally, if not solely, upon the force of authority. All the admiration I have myself expressed is strictly sincere: I have uttered no affected raptures; and I have not spoken but from the unchanging opinion of a long and studious life.

To have given novelty to a subject so often treated, would be almost a hopeless wish. In



stating the dry facts of such a topic there can be little variety of expression: but I have rather relied upon the force of opinions and comments, than of facts already known: of the justness and taste of these, and of the manner in which they are expressed, others must judge: the quality on which I rely is their sincerity. I have not been pleading as a plausible advocate for one whom I have undertaken the task of praising: the difficulty has not been in finding pleas for admiration, but in finding language adequate to the demands for which excellence gave occasion. The personal character of the poet should be all along concurrent with the genius of his poetry. From his very childhood he was a worshipper of the Muse Urania.

It has been unfortunate for Milton that his most popular biographer should be Johnson, whose *Memoir* is written in such a deliberate spirit of detraction as to fix on the writer a certain degree of moral turpitude. As a critic he has here shown extreme insensibility and want of taste, except on the 'Paradise Lost,' of which his eulogy, though strongly expressed, is, as I shall attempt to prove, little more in substance than a copy from Addison.

He who criticised Milton with the most congenial spirit was Thomas Warton. Hayley had an amiable enthusiasm; but his style was languid, diffuse, and often sickly, full of colloquial and feminine superlatives; such as "most affectionate"—"most tender"—"most afflicting." Hayley

was full of elegant erudition, but he had no imagination: Bishop Newton was classical, but feeble and unoriginal: Bentley and Warburton were acute but fantastic. It is hardly necessary to characterise minor annotators.

## CHAPTER XX.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CRITICISMS ON 'PARADISE  
LOST, BY ADDISON AND JOHNSON.'

THE two grand criticisms on the 'Paradise Lost' are those of Addison and Johnson. Whatever praise Johnson may have obtained for what he has written on this subject, a strict examination will show that he owes entirely to his predecessor: all is drawn from Addison: it is true, that he has clothed it in his own diction; and that it had passed through the ordeal of his own mind, so as not to be reproduced identical; but yet precisely similar: it has a more compressed contexture; and more point, which is taken for more force.

Both critics consider this divine poem under the four heads of fable, characters, sentiments, and language; and both concur in all the necessary requisites of each, and that Milton has fulfilled them all. As an epitome of Addison, that which Johnson has written is valuable; as an original, it has no merit at all. In one respect it is more adapted to modern taste; that it less often insists on bringing those questions to the standard

models of Homer and Virgil; which, however excellent, must be now admitted to be sometimes arbitrary: in general, however, they are founded on reason, and therefore indispensable.

As greatness is the first quality, the superiority of Milton's fable to those of Homer and Virgil cannot be disputed: nor is his manner of conducting it less skilful and perfect; having unity, always going forward to its end, and never interrupted by irrelevant episodes. The vastness of the invention of the outline, when little could be drawn from tradition, history, or observation, is stupendous.

The characters are equally out of the conception of mere human musing. The delineation of Satan, and the other Fallen Angels, would have appeared to any other mind but Milton's beyond the reach of human ability. The ideas of Adam and Eve before the Fall might not appear so utterly hopeless; but as they then partook of divinity, nothing but the boldest imagination could have ventured upon the subject.

The sentiments appropriate to such characters could only be supplied by a genius partaking of an inspiration above humanity. The grandeur of thought must have been incessant, and liable to no depressions: the imagination of many may be strong enough to invent and communicate the workings of human passions and human intellects; but of angels in obedient bliss, of angels in rebellion, who but Milton could venture to paint the designs or emotions?

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Nor is the difficulty of adequate language less than of adequate conception. How are we to express the spiritual, but by the aid of signs drawn from materiality? And this is liable to the objection, that what is divine is degraded by an illustration from what is earthly. Even Milton himself has not escaped this censure. However, there is a considerable portion of Milton's poem which does not consist in the sublimity of imagery, but in what Johnson, I think, calls "argumentative sublimity;"—thoughts which are purely intellectual.

Johnson has not followed Addison through all the details in which these grand principles are examined and exemplified; but such as he has selected are mainly the same: nor has he failed to insist on the faults which have struck his predecessor. I am not sure that Addison himself, with all his candour, has not sometimes censured causelessly: I think that he has done so in the famous allegory of Sin and Death in the tenth book; and I am fortified in this opinion by Bishop Atterbury, whose taste was not only unquestionable, but exquisite. It is an invention of inexpressible magnificence, both in conception and expression: its materiality is the object of disapprobation by the critics.

It seems to me impossible to draw the line how far the shadowy beings of spirit may be represented by poets as taking part in material agency: if not allowed at all, there must be an end to the sublimest allegories.

It is true that Sin and Death might have passed from the gates of hell to earth without building a bridge of such materials as Milton supposes: but though it was not necessary, I cannot consider it an unpardonable license upon the ground of its materiality. It may be said that it is allowable to personify abstract ideas, and give them some minglement of action; but not to carry it far. Thus Gray, in his 'Hymn to Adversity,' speaks of her "iron hand;" and Collins, in his 'Ode to the Passions,' exhibits of Fear as striking the "chords" of the harp. But such ideal creatures may surely be allowed to act a little more on reality than this. The rule is good, that the invention ought not to go beyond what we are capable of believing,—at least in our moments of enthusiasm. Whether the allegory of Sin and Death, under the effect of such vivid and sublime description, goes beyond this, will depend on the different structure of different minds. For my part, I can see the gates of hell open, and the bridge in the progress of its formation! There are many passages in the poetry of the Bible not less typified by material description; but many of these objectors are the very people who have least genuine taste for spirituality.

One of the finest passages of Johnson is the following:—"The appearances of nature, and the occurrences of life, did not satiate Milton's appetite of greatness. To paint things as they are requires a minute attention, and employs the memory rather than the fancy: Milton's delight

was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind: he sent his faculties out upon discovery into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings, to trace the counsels of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven." But this is far above the general tone of his criticisms; and is half undone again by a passage in a subsequent page, where he speaks of the inconvenience of the design, which requires the description of what cannot be described,—the agency of spirits: he is sometimes raised above himself by the inspiration of Addison's noble essay; then he sinks again to his own level. It was not Addison's opinion that the agency of spirits could not be described; he only says that spirits must not be too particularly engaged in action. Bishop Newton justifies these agencies of imaginary beings: I have no doubt that they are the very essences of the highest poetry. It is true, that to bring Violence, Strength, and Death on the stage, as active persons, is absurd; and that what may be introduced in poetry may be sometimes improper for the definite lines and colourings of sculpture and painting. What is most sublime is often vague, and half enveloped in mists.

Addison says, "Milton seems to have known perfectly well wherein his strength lay, and has therefore chosen a subject entirely conformable to those talents of which he was master. As his

genius was wonderfully turned to the sublime, the subject is the noblest that could have entered into the thoughts of man: every thing that is truly great and astonishing has a place in it: the whole system of the intellectual world,—the chaos, and the creation—heaven, earth, and hell,—enter into the constitution of his poem.”

Johnson follows in the same steps, and begins almost in the same words:—“He seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius; and to know what it was that nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others,—the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful: he therefore chose a subject on which too much could not be said; on which he might tire his fancy without the censure of extravagance.” So much for Johnson’s originality!

There is indeed one leading passage in Johnson’s criticism, of which no traces can be found in Addison:—and behold what it is!—

“Original deficiency cannot be supplied: the want of human interest is always felt. ‘Paradise Lost’ is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. ~~None ever wished it longer than it is.~~ Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. ~~We~~ read Milton for instruction; retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions!”

Such was Johnson’s taste; such his sensibility;



such the character of his intellect ! Yet this is he whose censorious and heartless judgment is to blast the fame of poets of less strength than Milton, yet of great merits, like Gray and Collins !—who is to set up Blackmore and Watts ; and exalt Dryden and Pope above all other men of poetical genius !

Having thus closely examined this celebrated critique of the biographer, I find that it sinks to nothing ; and as almost all his pretensions to critical judgment in the higher branches of poetry have been founded on it, the ground ought surely to be taken from under him. In his discrimination of the respective merits of Dryden and Pope he is more at home, and therefore more to be depended on.

As to Addison's Essay, it ought to be studied and almost got by heart by every cultivated mind which understands the English language. It is in all respects a masterly performance ; just in thought, full of taste and the finest sensibility, eloquent and beautiful in composition, widely learned, and so clearly explanatory of the true principles of poetry, that whoever is master of them, cannot mistake in his decision of poetical merit. It puts Milton above all other poets on such tests as cannot be resisted.

One thing however must be observed, that neither Addison nor Johnson seem much acquainted with Italian poetry.

It cannot be unacceptable to put before the reader a few extracts from Addison :—

“ Homer and Virgil introduced persons whose

characters are commonly known among men, and such as are to be met with either in history, or in ordinary conversation : Milton's characters, most of them, lie out of nature, and were to be formed purely by his own invention. It shows a greater genius in Shakspeare to have drawn his Caliban, than his Hotspur, or Julius Cæsar : the one was to be supplied out of his own imagination, whereas the other might have been formed upon tradition, history, and observation. It was much easier, therefore, for Homer to find proper sentiments for an assembly of Grecian generals, than for Milton to diversify his infernal council with proper characters, and inspire them with a variety of sentiments. The loves of Dido and Æneas are only copies of what has passed between other persons. Adam and Eve before the Fall are a different species from that of mankind, who are descended from them ; and none but a poet of the most unbounded invention and the most exquisite judgment, could have filled their conversation and behaviour with so many apt circumstances during their state of innocence.

“ Nor is it sufficient for an epic poem to be filled with such thoughts as are natural, unless it abound also with such as are sublime. Milton's chief talent, and indeed his distinguishing excellence, lies in the sublimity of his thoughts. There are others of the moderns, who rival him in every other part of poetry ; but in the greatness of his sentiments, he triumphs over all the poets both modern and ancient, Homer only excepted. It

is impossible for the imagination of man to distend itself with greater ideas, than those which he has laid together in his first, second, and sixth books. The seventh, which describes the creation of the world, is likewise wonderfully sublime, though not so apt to stir up emotion in the mind of the reader, nor consequently so perfect in the epic way of writing, because it is filled with less action. Let the judicious reader compare what Longinus has observed on several passages in Homer, and he will find parallels for most of them in the 'Paradise Lost.'"

Again, in another place —

"Aristotle observes, that the fable of an epic poem should abound in circumstances that are both credible and astonishing; or, as the French critic chooses to phrase it, the fable should be filled with the probable and the marvellous. This rule is as fine and just as any in Aristotle's whole Art of Poetry.

"If the fable is only probable, it differs nothing from a true history; if it is only marvellous, it is no better than a romance: the great secret therefore of heroic poetry is to relate such circumstances as may produce in the reader at the same time both belief and astonishment. This is brought to pass in a well-chosen fable, by the account of such things as have really happened according to the received opinions of mankind. / Milton's fable is a master-piece of this nature; as the War in Heaven, the Condition of the Fallen Angels, the State of Innocence, the Temptation of the Serpent,

and the Fall of Man, though they are very astonishing in themselves, are not only credible, but actual points of faith.

“ Again, when Satan is within prospect of Eden, and looking round upon the glories of the creation, he is filled with sentiments different from those which he discovered whilst he was in hell. The place inspires him with thoughts more adapted to it: he reflects upon the happy condition from whence he fell, and breaks forth into a speech that is softened with several transient touches of remorse and self-accusation: but at length he confirms himself in impenitence, and in his design of drawing man into his own state of guilt and misery. This conflict of passions is raised with a great deal of art, as the opening of his speech to the sun is very bold and noble.

“ The speech is, I think, the finest that is ascribed to Satan in the whole poem. The evil spirit afterwards proceeds to make his discoveries concerning our first parents, and to learn after what manner they may be best attacked. His bounding over the walls of Paradise; his sitting in the shape of a cormorant upon the tree of life, which stood in the centre of it, and overtopped all the other trees of the garden; his alighting among the herd of animals, which are so beautifully represented as playing about Adam and Eve, together with his transforming himself into different shapes, in order to hear their conversations, are circumstances that give an agreeable surprise to the reader, and are devised

with great art, to connect that series of adventures in which the poet has engaged this great artificer of fraud.

“The thought of Satan’s transformation into a cormorant, and placing himself on the Tree of Life, seems raised upon that passage in the *Iliad*, where two deities are described as perching at the top of an oak in the shape of vultures.

“His planting himself at the ear of Eve under the form of a toad, in order to produce vain dreams and imaginations, is a circumstance of the same nature, as his starting up in his own form is wonderfully fine, both in the literal description, and in the moral which is concealed under it. His answer upon his being discovered, and demanded to give an account of himself, is conformable to the pride and intrepidity of his character.”

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

“THE description of Adam and Eve” (continues Addison in his admirable Essay,) “in the fourth book, as they first appeared to Satan, is exquisitely drawn, and sufficient to make the fallen angel gaze upon them with all that astonishment, and those emotions of envy, in which he is represented.

“There is a fine spirit of poetry in the lines which follow ; wherein they are described as sitting on a bed of flowers, by the side of a fountain, amidst a mixed assembly of animals. The speeches of these first two lovers flow equally from passion and sincerity : the professions they make to one another are full of warmth ; but at the same time founded on truth : in a word, they are the gallantries of Paradise. The part of Eve’s speech, in which she gives an account of herself upon her first creation, and the manner in which she was brought to Adam, is, I think, as beautiful a passage as any in Milton, or perhaps in any other poet whatsoever. These passages are

all worked off with so much art, that they are capable of pleasing the most delicate reader, without offending the most severe:—

That day I oft remember, when from sleep, &c.

A poet of less judgment and invention than this great author would have found it very difficult to have filled these tender parts of the poem with sentiments proper for a state of innocence; to have described the warmth of love, and the professions of it, without artifice or hyperbole; to have made the man speak the most endearing things, without descending from his natural dignity, and the woman receiving them without departing from the modesty of her character; in a word, to adjust the prerogative of wisdom and beauty, and make each appear to the other in its proper force and loveliness. This mutual subordination of the two sexes is wonderfully kept up in the whole poem, as, particularly on the speech of Eve, I have before mentioned, and upon the conclusion of it; when the poet adds that the devil turned aside with envy at the sight of so much happiness, v. 492, &c.”

Of all the difficulties Milton had to overcome, the greatest seems to me to have been the description of the battle of the angels in the sixth book; because he was necessitated to resort to material agency. It is founded on Rev. xii. 7, 8,—“There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought, and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was

their place found any more in heaven." Bishop Newton says, "within the compass of this one book we have all the variety of battles that can well be conceived. We have a single combat and a general engagement: the first day's fight is with darts and swords, in imitation of the ancients: the second day's fight is with artillery, in imitation of the moderns; but the images in both are raised proportionably to the superior nature of the beings here described: and when the poet has briefly comprised all that has any foundation in fact and reality, he has recourse to the fiction of the poets in their descriptions of the giants' war with the Gods. And,

When war hath thus perform'd what war can do,

he rises still higher, and the Son of God is sent forth, in the majesty of the Almighty Father, agreeably to Scripture; so much doth the sublimity of Holy Writ transcend all that is true, and all that is feigned, in description."

In the following passages, Addison rises to a sublimity, which assuredly has never, in any criticism, been surpassed:—

"It required great pregnancy of invention, and strength of imagination, to fill this battle with such circumstances as should raise and astonish the mind of the reader; and, at the same time, an exactness of judgment to avoid every thing that might appear light or trivial. Those who look into Homer, are surprised to find his battles still rising one above another, and improving in



horror to the end of the Iliad. Milton's fight of angels is wrought up with the same beauty: it is ushered in with such signs of wrath as are suitable to Omnipotence incensed. The first engagement is carried on under a cope of fire, occasioned by the flights of innumerable burning darts and arrows which are discharged from either host. The second onset is still more terrible, as it is filled with those artificial thunders which seem to make the victory doubtful, and produce a kind of consternation even in the good angels. This is followed by the tearing up of mountains and promontories; till, in the last place, Messiah comes forth in the fulness of majesty and terror. The pomp of his appearance, amidst the roarings of his thunders, the flashes of his lightnings, and the noise of his chariot-wheels, is described with the utmost flights of human imagination.

“There is nothing on the first and last day's engagement which does not appear natural, and agreeable enough to the ideas most readers would conceive of a fight between two armies of angels.

“The second day's engagement is apt to startle an imagination, which has not been raised and qualified for such a description by the reading of the ancient poets, and of Homer in particular. It was certainly a very bold thought in our author to ascribe the first use of artillery to the rebel angels: but as such a pernicious invention may be well supposed to have proceeded from such authors, so it entered very properly into the thoughts of that being, who is all along described as aspi-

ring to the majesty of his Maker. Such engines were the only instruments he could have made use of to imitate those thunders, that in all poetry, both sacred and profane, are represented as the arms of the Almighty. The tearing up of hills was not altogether so daring a thought as the former: we are in some measure prepared for such an incident by the description of the giants' war, which we meet with in many of the ancient poets. What still made this circumstance the more proper for the poet's use, is the opinion of many learned men, that the fable of the giants' war, which makes so great a noise in antiquity, and gave birth to the sublimest description in Hesiod's works, was an allegory founded upon this very tradition of a fight between the good and bad angels.

“Milton has taken every thing that is sublime from the Latin and Greek poets in the giants' wars, and composes out of them the following great image:—

From their foundations loosening to and fro,  
They pluck'd the seated hills with all their load,—  
Rocks, waters, woods, and by the shaggy tops  
Uplifting, bore them in their hands.

“Milton has likewise raised his description in this book with many images taken out of the poetical parts of Scripture. The Messiah's chariot is formed upon a vision of Ezekiel, who, as Grotius observes, has very much in him of Homer's spirit in the poetical parts of his prophecy. The lines, in that glorious commission which is

given the Messiah, to extirpate the host of rebel angels, are drawn from a sublime passage in the Psalms. The reader will easily discover many other strokes of the same nature.

“As Homer has introduced into his battle of the gods every thing that is great and terrible in nature, Milton has filled his fight of good and bad angels with all the like circumstances of horror. The shout of armies, the rattling of brazen chariots, the hurling of rocks and mountains, the earthquakes, the fire, the thunder, are all of them employed to lift up the reader’s imagination, and give him a suitable idea of so great an action. With what art has the poet represented the whole body of the earth trembling even before it was created ! ver. 218, &c. In how sublime and just a manner does he afterwards describe the orbed heaven shaking under the wheels of the Messiah’s chariot, with that exception of the throne of God ! Notwithstanding the Messiah appears clothed with so much terror and majesty, the poet has still found means to make his readers conceive an idea of him, beyond what he himself is able to describe, ver. 832, &c. In a word, Milton’s genius, which was so great in itself, and so strengthened by all the helps of learning, appears in this book every way equal to his subject, which was the most sublime that could enter into the thoughts of a poet.”

Speaking of the eighth book, which describes the creation of Adam and Eve, Addison says,—  
“These, and the like wonderful incidents in this

part of the work, have in them all the beauties of novelty, at the same time that they have all the graces of nature: they are such as none but a great genius could have thought of; though, upon a perusal of them, they seem to rise, of themselves, from the subject of which he treats. In a word, though they are natural, they are not obvious; which is the true character of all fine writing.”\*

In the tenth book, upon the arrival of Sin and Death into the works of the Creation, he observes,—“The following passage, ver. 641, &c., is formed upon that glorious image in Holy Writ, which compares the voice of an innumerable host of angels uttering hallelujahs, to the voice of mighty thunderings, or of many waters.” He continues:—

“Though the author, in the whole course of his poem, particularly in the book we are now examining, has infinite allusions to places of Scripture, I have only taken notice in my remarks of such as are of a poetical nature, and which are woven with great beauty into the body of this fable: of this kind is that passage in the present book, where, describing Sin as marching through the works of nature, he adds,

————— Behind her Death,  
Close following pace for pace, not mounted yet  
On his pale horse:

which alludes to that passage in Scripture, so wonderfully poetical, and terrifying to the ima-

\* Johnson has borrowed this in speaking of Gray's Elegy.

gination:—‘And I looked, and beheld a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him: and power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with sickness, and with the beasts of the earth.’”

Addison concludes his series of eloquent, just, and admirable criticisms thus:—

“I have now finished my observations on a work which does an honour to the English nation. I have taken a general view of it under these four heads,—the fable, the characters, the sentiments, and the language: I have in the next place spoken of the censures which our author may incur under each of these heads; of which I might have enlarged the number if I had been disposed to dwell on so ungrateful a subject. I believe, however, that the severest reader will not find any little fault in heroic poetry, which this author has fallen into, that does not come under one of those heads, among which I have distributed his several blemishes.

“After having thus treated at large of ‘Paradise Lost,’ I could not think it sufficient to have celebrated this poem in the whole, without descending to particulars: I have therefore endeavoured not only to prove that the poem is beautiful in general, but to point out its particular beauties, and to determine wherein they consist. I have endeavoured to show how some passages are beautiful by being sublime; others by being soft; others by being natural; which of

them are recommended by the passion ; which by the moral ; which by the sentiment ; and which by the expression. I have likewise endeavoured to show how the genius of the poet shines by a happy invention, a distant allusion, or judicious imitation ; how he had copied or improved Homer or Virgil, and raises his own imaginations by the use he has made of several poetical passages in Scripture. I might have inserted also several passages of Tasso which our author has imitated ; but as I do not look upon Tasso to be a sufficient voucher, I would not perplex my reader with such quotations, as might do more honour to the Italian than the English poet. In short, I have endeavoured to particularise those innumerable kinds of beauty, which it would be tedious to recapitulate, but which are essential to poetry ; and which may be met with in the works of this great author."

I have here cited enough to draw again the attention of the modern reader to an elegant and exquisite author, whom the more recent fame of subsequent critics seems in some degree to have pushed aside ; but who is as superior to Johnson, as Milton is to Pope or Dryden. Addison was not vigorous in his metrical compositions ; but he had a beautiful invention in prose. He was a classical scholar, of far finer taste than Johnson ; and if not more profound as a moralist, more rich, more chaste, and, as it seems to me, more original. Johnson's critique on Milton is an instance how much he secretly borrowed. In his

‘Rambler’ is a large proportion of verbiage : he has none of that nice, delicate, and sensitive discrimination which delights in Addison ; those touches of the heart ; those unforced and mellow observations ; those flashes of polished and exquisite humour. He too often dictates as a pedagogue, and silences by his coarseness.

It is not out of place thus to censure him in a ‘Life of Milton,’ whom he has traduced with as much bad taste in literature as malignity of temper. And what is the worth of the praise by which he has affected to counteract his scoffs and his cavils ?—a disguised echo of the encomium of a predecessor, whose principles of poetry he was outraging by the whole tenor of his own judgments through the series of poetical biographies he was then composing. Examine the rules by which Addison has tried the details of execution in the successive books of ‘Paradise Lost :’ will the praises or censures of Johnson on the poets whom he has criticised abide these tests ? Johnson cared little for poetical invention, for imagery, or for sentiment : his whole idea of excellence lay in what he called ratiocination in verse : thus Dryden and Pope were his supreme favourites.

I remember how he shocked the taste and the creed of the higher and more imaginative classes of his poetical readers, when his ‘Lives’ came out : but he was the fashion of the day ; and the attempt was vain to stem the tide. The sensitive were stunned by his coarseness ; and the world-

lings and the talkers became insolent in their triumph. An epigrammatic point, an observation on life, a stinging couplet, can be felt and repeated by every pert disputant in society: but cite a noble passage from a great poet, and it draws sneers or ridicule!

Johnson's work did great injury to the national taste; and debases it even to this day. Imagination, repressed in its proper issues, has broken out in wrong places: it has become fantastic and distorted; in seeking not to be obvious, it has become unnatural. In the search for novelty we ought not to feign impossibilities or improbabilities: nothing should be extravagant; nothing over-coloured. We are to imagine what may be; but which is at the same time grand, beautiful, or pathetic. We are to take advantage of the dim hints of remote history, to fill up the details with the marvellous, the sublime, and the fair. Poetry deals more with the imagination than the understanding; but it must not outrage the understanding.

Some contend that Johnson had imagination: if he had, it was the imagination of big and vague words: all his 'Rasselas' consists of generalisations: it is little more than a series of moral observations; sometimes powerful or plaintive; too often pompous and verbose, where triteness is covered by grandiloquence. On a few occasions he may have been picturesque—especially in his 'Journey to the Hebrides;' but very rarely. Sounding words are easily put to-



gether by one long practised in literary composition. He has given no proof of distinct images; of that power of selecting the leading feature, which revives the whole object, and which, above all others, Milton and Shakspeare possessed; and which distinguish—as the epithets in Gray's 'Elegy,' and Collins's 'Ode to Evening.' Johnson not only could not invent such, but his mind had no mirror for them when they were presented by others; it gave him no pleasure to muse upon them. He had the faculty of powerful reason and strong memory; but the materials of thought afforded by his fancy were sterile and few: he loved therefore society and busy manners for the purposes of observation; in solitude he was miserable: he had no relief from painful recollections. It is thus, in part, that we may account for his distaste of Milton. When he praised, the praise was extorted, and borrowed under the powerful authority of a mightier critic.

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE MERITS OF MILTON COMPARED WITH THOSE  
OF OTHER POETS.

It is universally admitted that the primary and most essential quality of a poet is invention; but it must be invention also of a sublime or beautiful kind; and, to be perfect, it must display this excellence in fable, characters, sentiments, and language. Of all our English poets Milton only has combined all these merits. Shakspeare wanted the first, though he was admirable in the last three. What invention of fable, or even of character, is there in Dryden or Pope? I can hardly think that strictly they have invention of sentiments; for these are by them drawn from observation.

Spenser attained the marvellous in pure invention; but his fictions go beyond nature, and outrage our faith. Chaucer's tales are rarely, if ever, original: they are principally borrowed from the Italians, or from old romances. Sackville's famous legend is historical.

The productions of subsequent poems of the

best fame,—I do not speak of the living,—are too brief for much fable, except of Lord Byron: but whatever splendours Lord Byron had, his fables are generally extravagant. In Cowley, Waller, Denham, Prior, Thomson, Collins, Gray, Young, Akenside, Shenstone, Cowper, Burns, Beattie, the Wartons, Kirke White, Shelley,\* Coleridge, there was no fable. In Crabbe were short fables;—but if they did not want nature, they wanted dignity: they were colloquial and monotonous. Hayley had nothing of the force of fiction;—all his incidents were unpoetical.

Thus it is, that before the sun of Milton all other stars are paled,—unless of Homer and Virgil;—and what is there in the fable of these two that can stand before the divine brightness of the bard of angels?

With regard to characters,—invention of such as are at once true to nature, and yet grand, or attractive, is very rare. Those of Dryden and Pope are portraits,—copied from individuals: they are admirable as portraits:—but they have not the sublimity of poetic invention; they have frail humanity for their types. They have not the magnificence of Satan and his brother rebels,—still less of the good angels, nor the purity and beauty of Adam and Eve.

Where there is not invention, there cannot be adequate grandeur. Experience and reality fall short of our ideal greatness. We can always

\* Sir Walter Scott requires an examination peculiar to himself.

imagine higher things than we observe ; and give full evidence to that imagination :—but not if it exceeds probability,—or at least possibility.—*Incredulus odi*.—Shakspeare, having conceived a character, always preserves it, as Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Lear, Hamlet, &c. Each electrifies by acting appropriately : but this can never be effected by drawing merely from observation : the inventor is the master of the very soul of the person he invents. He rules all the motives and conduct of the invented being ;—and if he paints any inconsistency, it is from his own weakness, and want of sagacity.

The same principles apply to the sentiments as to the characters : if not in conformity with the moral and intellectual traits of the character represented, they are faulty ; while that character itself must be striking and estimable, as well as natural.

To invent fable, characters, sentiments,—all with these excellencies,—can only be within the power of a gigantic mind.—Lastly, we come to the language. This ought to be such as expresses these complex inventions the most clearly, most harmoniously, and at the same time with the most dignity. Whatever overlays them,—whatever draws attention from the thought to the words,—is faulty : if the thought is good, it does not want to be raised by the dress :—if it is weak, or trite, it is not fit for poetry ; and no ornament of cover can supply a radical defect :—on the contrary, it is a deception, which, when detected, disgusts.—*Tinnit ;—inane est*.—The florid style is always bad.

An over-regard to a monotonous harmony fatigues in Pope. Nothing can be more tiresome than a long continuation of the unbroken couplet.

Milton's metrical combinations,—unfettered by rhyme,—run into every vanity and extent of musical cadence;—and his diction has often double force from its bold nakedness. His majestic thoughts support themselves in the plainest words.

What is called an illustrative imagination is a feebler sort of power:—it is a petty invention.—Metaphors and similes may occasionally show visibly what in its abstraction is not easily conceived; but these are rarely necessary except in didactic poetry, which is of an inferior class. Sometimes the thought and the metaphor rise together in the mind, and cannot be separated; but there are spiritual ideas sublimer than any illustration from materiality.

The embodiment ought to lie, not in the metaphor, but in the abstraction itself. By the junction of the metaphor there are two ideas; and the attention is drawn from the principal to the secondary. He, whose chief strength exists in his secondary ideas, is not a great poet. I must confess that I think this was mainly the case with Dryden and Pope. What are Pope's 'Moral Essays' but illustration and decoration?—A vast proportion of the primary thoughts is trite.—There is no embodiment except in the dress:—the inside remains abstract. There is not only no contexture of fable, but no fable at all. Mere skill in lan-

guage can never supply the want of fable, or characters, or sentiments.

Characters and sentiments derive a complex force from a well-combined fable: they are comparatively feeble, if insulated. The actions and the movements of the head and heart are operated upon by the conflicting or consecutive incidents of the fable; and each differently according to the discriminative conformation of the respective actors.

That generalisation, which separates the represented being from an intricate and particular train of circumstances, can never exhibit him in those strong, affecting, and vivid lights, which are forced forward by the gradual developments of a well-feigned and well-told tale.

Let Pope draw the characters of Buckingham and Wharton,—to say nothing of the absence of invention,—we do not read them in a moral worked up by the recital of a long succession of incidents. They are single figures,—contemplated only by themselves.

The absence of fable, then, is a defect, which must insuperably disqualify a candidate for a seat on the highest point of Parnassus. Will the ‘Rape of the Lock’ be pleaded in Pope’s favour? Here the invention has neither greatness nor nature: it is a sportive trifle, as far as the fable goes: it is a piece of exquisite artifice; a laboured gem of fillagree-work.

The power of language must not be wanting;—but it is the least of the four requisites. It can-

not be truly good, where the thought is wanting;—but it is sometimes wanting where the thought is good. It is that, of which the semblance of excellence is most easily attained; and which is most apt to delude the common reader.

Flowing language is the taste of superficial and feeble minds: perhaps it is because they only regard the ornament, and can take in but a single image at a time. If there be deep thought into the bargain, it is too complex for them.

Let us suppose,—what I am afraid is true,—that Milton is too high for the voluntary taste of common intellect;—yet it is surely a duty, that all who desire to attain the advantages of a cultivated education, should have impressed upon them by labour and care his sublimity, his beauty, and his wisdom. We may not only improve, but acquire taste by patient lessons. By distinctly studying the genuine purposes of poetry; by having pointed out to us in whom the chief merit lies; by learning in what it consists; by clear definitions and demonstrative explanations; by examples precisely applicable; by calm reasoning; by unexaggerated praise,—we may assist and lead the popular opinion and sympathy.

There will always be books of bad criticism,—books proceeding not only from a vicious judgment or mean taste, but from interested motives; and these will have the more effect, because they flatter the opinions and failings of the vulgar: but they ought not to go uncounteracted:—what is repeated without contradiction is soon taken to be a truth.

The true principles of poetical invention laid down by Addison are incontrovertible; but they are not such as are assumed by common critics,—who deem the improbable and the extravagant a greater proof of genius than the natural;—who, at the same time, like a tale of familiar life better than a tale of genuine grandeur; and who consider a piquant epigram on the manners of daily occurrence a better proof of intellect and sagacity than an epic poem.

I know not why vulgarity should be considered natural; but, if it be so, there is a high nature also, as well as a low nature, and poets are bound to choose the best. The characters, the sentiments, the language—all must follow the tone and colours of the fable. In choosing his fable, therefore, Milton felt conscious of his own gigantic power. Any other mind would have shrunk from the hope to sustain the other requisites at the same height. Homer or Virgil might find no difficulty in supporting the career of Achilles, Hector, or Æneas; but how different the case of the first two of human beings before the Fall; or of their seducer, the rebel angel—Satan!

There is copious and diversified invention in the *Fairy Queen*; but it wants unity, and unbroken progression to one definite end. It is almost like a collection of episodes: the tales are concurrent rather than consecutive. Under all the influences of chivalry, when it was not yet extinct, the mind might be brought to have a poetical belief of those tales as allegories; but that belief can scarcely be sustained now that the feudal ages



have passed away. Even in Spenser's own age, he often verged on the bounds of what the mind would then deem extravagant. Our poetical belief in 'Paradise Lost' is cherished by our belief in Scripture. It is miraculous that he never offends the imagination, considering our habitual awe on such subjects.

Dante is often sublime as he is gloomy, and has a grand and vast imaginative invention; but he has no combination and unity of fable; and he has only sketches and outlines rather than finished characters. His sentiments are sometimes obscure, and there is a mass of crude and irrelevant intermixtures: it is something of a chaos of mighty fragments, rather than a regular building of finished Gothic architecture. Of Milton, all the parts are exactly disposed, and none left imperfect: they are all of the same date, in the same style, and in the most graceful proportions.

Beautiful poetry, with an equal regard to the four essential principles, may be written on a far humbler subject than Milton's: but where is it now to be found?—and why has it not been written? One cause I would assign is this, that false criticism chills it. Technical critics require technical excellencies: they like finer work, and gaudy colours, and varnish: they pay little regard to the solid ore; they look to the mechanical workmanship: there must be a flower here, and a piece of gold leaf there; and all must be polished into one uniform model till it shines, and sparkles, and dazzles: or, on the other hand, it

must be full of such wonders as were never heard or thought of before;—raving expressions, irregular and dissonant numbers, and an affected sort of madness, which is called originality and invention ! Since the bursting forth of the French Revolution in 1789, we have had a great deal of this : it has begun to subside ; better criticisms and wiser times are come. Nothing unnatural and monstrous has ever long kept its hold on the public taste.

Addison's rules are so founded on eternal reason, that they never can be shaken. There cannot be true poetry of a high order without invention of fable, characters, and sentiments,—and those having such qualities as the critic demands. A fantastic invention is the invention of a madman : it is not genius ! The purpose of poetry is to convey exalted truths through the medium of feigned examples : if it gives no instruction, one requisite of prime poetry is wanting. They who only deal in decorative poetry, produce flowers without fruits ; and, generally, only artificial flowers.

If we receive any pleasure from these stimulative compositions, they work us into a factitious fury, which unfits us for the sober business of life. We retire from the holy strains of Milton, improved in wisdom, fortified against the ills of existence, patient in adversity, and glorying in the works of the Creator. His enthusiasm is always philosophical.

Many will think me too severe in the applica-

tion of the theory I have adopted, because it will degrade into a much lower class several of their favourite poets. They may still regard them with affection, for they may still afford them refined pleasures ; but we must not put their pretensions on false grounds. He cannot strictly deserve the name of poet, who is not an inventor or creator ; and he who does not admire Milton to enthusiasm, does not know what poetry is : he may delude himself, but the test is infallible. Mean and dull minds love the worst poets most, or, rather, those smooth versifiers who have no poetry in them.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## ON 'PARADISE REGAINED.'

THERE is less complex fable in the 'Paradise Regained' than in its predecessor: it is chiefly argumentative, while the other is narrative, dramatic, and full of imagery; but it is scarcely less sublime, if we may allow of argumentative sublimity. It has far more of the moral and practical wisdom, which relates to the state of mankind after the Fall, and therefore affords more lessons of instruction. It has less of the blaze of the sun, but more of the mellow mildness of its setting radiance: it has, however, enough of fable in it, in the poetical sense: the characters are few, and the language, for the most part, subdued and plain: the sentiments are abundant, wise, elevated, and beautiful. Here the poet is more profuse, and more rich, even than in the 'Paradise Lost.'

I cannot bring myself to admit that there is less genius or less excellence in this poem than in the other. If fable were the only grand essence of poetry, then I must yield. Imagery implies

materiality and embodiment: so far it is less splendid; but my own taste leads me to the intellectual, the spiritual, the ideal. This may allow of fable, as well as what is more narrative; yet it cannot be denied that there is less invention in the 'Paradise Regained:' the story being singular, there was less opportunity for it.

Milton had, in the second book of his Reason of Church Government, long before hinted that the rules of Aristotle were not always strictly to be kept; but rather nature to be followed; and that the Book of Job might be considered as "a brief model of an epic poem."

However we may rebel against the principles of Aristotle when they are arbitrary, we must consider the greater part of them to be built on nature and truth; and, so far, not to be departed from. Fiction, therefore, whether imaginative or spiritual, is indispensable to poetry. For this reason, history in metre is not poetry; nor is the narrative of what is drawn from observation poetry.

I am fully aware what will be the result of an adherence to these strict principles: it will exclude a great part of what has taken to itself the name of poetry. When a writer of verses speaks in his own person, and describes, not his visionary, but his actual feelings and opinions, it is not poetry. We cannot lift ourselves up to the height of an invented character, because sad realities intervene to chill us.

Let us take the example of a popular author,

and refer to Cowper's 'Task.' Here is no fable; here are no invented characters; it wants therefore a primary essential of the best poetry. Then why does it please?—because it is the language of poetry; because in his own person the author speaks the sentiments and tone of poetry. Still the one grand requisite is not there.

The same objection applies to the greater part of Cowley's works, except to the language, where there is often beautiful imagery. I believe nobody reads the 'Davideis.' There is no invented fable in Pope's 'Eloisa:'—all that is borrowed either from biography or former fictions. All the charm lies in the animation, passion, and harmonious eloquence of the style and versification.

The true poet surrounds himself with ideal worlds; he lives out of himself; he lives in others, but those others of his own creation. He escapes from realities to possibilities; but how few have strength of wing for this! Scarce any can long support themselves in the air: in those ethereal realms their wings soon droop beneath the heat. They are willing to rest upon the earth, and be content with the solid substances around and before them.

Appeals to the imagination, however, are not the less excellent because they are above the vulgar taste. Because there are those among the people whom something of fact pleases better than exalted fiction, is this fiction to be debased in the scale of excellence?

We know not the mysteries of Providence, nor

why this great poetical genius is so sparingly dispensed: we only know that upon this great scale all except four or five are found wanting. Poetical artists, whose skill lies in the mechanical parts, are numerous: the dress is a bauble; the creative thought is the essence. There is not much difficulty in finding language to illustrate a trite truth, and rhymes to give it harmony to the ear; but the combination of incidents, and exhibition of ideal characters, is another affair.

I have already said that we have scarcely any Epics in our language subsequent to Milton's, except the mean and miserable flatnesses of Blackmore: perhaps, however, a few modern poems may come under the denomination; as Southey's 'Joan of Arc,' 'Mador,' and 'Roderic,' and some of Scott's and Byron's productions; but Scott's are more lyrical, and many of Byron's Tales incline to this. They want the regularity of the old heroic poem: the characters, too, are not quite natural. Gray's 'Bard' may be called a fable; but if it be, it is a lyrical fable.

After the choice of subjects executed by Milton, all others fade into littleness. This is one of the difficulties which he has thrown upon his successors. The actors and the machinery from human materials must appear comparatively uninteresting. We may invent some great hero; but how spiritless will he appear before Satan! and how mean, before Adam and Eve, will all other human beings show themselves!

Still something might be done better than has

been done; at once natural, vigorous, and new. We may imagine characters distinctly discriminated, moral, intellectual, generous, bold, enterprising, lofty; and we may put them into a progression of movements, wading through conflicting obstacles, and going forwards to some great end. We may borrow these from no history, nor derive much from observation—the whole may be invention; yet we may keep close to the probabilities of nature, but nature sublimed by virtue, and high inborn endowments.

This will free us from the servile task of copying from actual examples, which freezes the energies of the mind, and binds us down in chains to the earth; because we can always imagine more than we can find, and conceive ideal virtue higher than any which experience justifies. So of ideal beauty:—we can embody visions of fairness and purity, such as no individual ever possessed.

But to invent single characters is not so impracticable, as to make several so invented act their parts in one story, and have their respective qualities drawn out by the conflict. ‘*Hic labor, hoc opus est.*’ A short poem, delineating a single character, real or imaginary, does but little. Prior’s ‘Henry and Emma’ goes a little farther, but the fable is not his own: he has merely given a modern versification to the dialogue. As far as it goes, it is very beautiful. Gray’s ‘Elegy’ is a soliloquy, and not of an ideal person. Not one of Dryden’s Fables is original.



It is remarked that the style of the ‘Paradise Regained’ is much less encumbered with allusions to abstruse learning than the ‘Paradise Lost.’ Different critics assign different reasons for this. It is probable that the poet was influenced by regard to the simple language of the New Testament: in previous parts of the Bible there is much more of poetical ornament and figurative richness.

It is probable also that the latter poem was written more hastily and less laboured. As to much imagery,—though a splendid charm, when just and grand, or beautiful,—it is not an essential of poetry. There may be invention, which is not in its strict sense imaginative: it may be purely intellectual and spiritual.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## OF MILTON'S JUVENILE POEMS.

It appears, that Milton, from the first verses he composed, always tended to sacred subjects, and was always familiar with the style and images of the Scripture: he had early the idea of an epic poem; but his first productions were short and lyrical: in these the invention lay in the sentiments and language: he was always picturesque, and often sublime: his 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso' are almost entirely descriptive, though there is something of a distinct character in those descriptions, as applicable to different states of mind. Here he speaks mainly in his own person, and consonant to his own individual taste: I think, however, that there is less originality in these than in most of his other poems.

'Comus' is the invention of a beautiful fable, enriched with shadowy beings and visionary delights: every line and word is pure poetry, and the sentiments are as exquisite as the images. It is a composition which no pen but Milton's could have produced; though Shakspeare could have

written many parts of it, yet with less regularity, and, of course, less philosophical thought and learning; less profundity and solemnity; but perhaps with more buoyancy and transparent flow.

‘*Lycidas*’ stands alone: Johnson says it has no passion; the passion results from the imaginative richness: the bursts of picturesque imagery give a melancholy rapture to a sensitive fancy. But Johnson had no fancy. It is like entering into an enchanted forest, where the wood-nymphs are mourning over their loves in strains of aerial music; or approaching a fairy island, where the sea-nymphs are singing melodious dirges from its promontories.

Johnson’s censure of Milton for representing himself and *Lycidas* as shepherds would go to destroy all figurative language. A shepherd’s, as long as poetry has been known, has been considered a poetical life: his converse with the fields and open air, joined to his leisure, connects itself with all picturesque imagery. The Scriptures would have afforded the critic an authority which one should have supposed he would have respected; as, for instance, the beautiful adaptation of Addison, beginning

The Lord my pasture shall prepare,  
And feed me with a shepherd’s care.

But Johnson had an abhorrence of a rural abode: with him “the full tide of life was at Charing-Cross.” He preferred the roll of the hackney-coach, and the cries of London, to the sound of the woodman’s axe, the shepherd’s halloo, and

the echo of the deep-mouthed hounds ringing from some forest-slope; and the witticisms of aldermen in waistcoats of scarlet and gold, at the full-clad table of Thrale the brewer, to dreams by the side of murmuring rivers, or a book in some shade, with the greenery of nature at his feet.

It is not true that there is no grief in 'Lycidas;' but grief shows itself in different minds according as they are differently constructed. An imaginative mind does not grieve in the same way as a sterile one: it is not stunned; it expatiates abroad: it dwells on all the scenes in which it has been associated with the object of its loss. If it is full of tears, those tears are gilded by hope: but Johnson looked to death only with a sullen gloom; he saw no bright emanations of joy playing in the skies: with him it was, that

Low, sullen sounds his grief beguiled.\*

Johnson prefers Cowley's 'Elegy on his friend W. Hervey,' on account of its plain unmetaphorical language. Why did he not mention that of Tickell on Addison, where he speaks of their walking and conversing in consecrated groves? The critic says there is no nature in 'Lycidas,' for there is no truth; no art, for there is nothing new. This I do not understand; a proper novelty is the result of genius, not of art. But the assertion that there is no novelty in this composition is not just: the imagery and the combinations are all new: raciness is one of its beautiful

\* Collins.

characteristics: it is full of imagery; but principally primal, not metaphorical imagery. 'Lycidas' appears to me much more vigorous, more expansive, more vivid, more full of sentiment and intellectuality, than 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' which are the popular favourites.

It is extraordinary that Johnson had the courage to venture such a disreputable criticism; but he was now in the height of his fame, and had grown humoursome and arbitrary. His contemporaries feared his vituperation and personal invectives. The Wartons were mild men, and loved too much their own quiet:\* Mason lived at a distance from him, and abhorred and feared him: Gray was dead: Johnson's club were all his flatterers and worshippers: Burke was absorbed in politics; and Sir Joshua Reynolds never ventured to engage in literary conflict with him. A few feeble missiles were aimed at him by Potter and other mediocrists; but it was a crisis of no brilliance: Hayley became a fashionable poet; and Beattie lost his spirits, and could not carry the 'Minstrel' beyond the second canto: Robertson and Gibbon were great in history; but they did not much concern themselves with poetry: Sir William Jones was yet young, vain, and ambitious to go with the stream: Horace Walpole was too delicate, and too fearful of

\* As T. Warton's book appeared in 1785, he probably composed his remarks soon after the 'Lives' were published in 1781. Whether he would have printed them while the doctor lived, may be a question.

the rude ridicule of Johnson to enter the lists with him; nor probably would his taste have led him to it: I doubt whether Milton's genius had much of his sympathy.

In this age, such an ebullition of vulgar acrimony and hard insensibility would not have been left unassailed and unrepelled. The Southey's, the Lockhart's, the Wordsworth's, the Wilson's, the Campbell's, the Moore's, and many an unfleshed sword besides, would all have stepped forth. The flattering Thrales, and Boswells, and Hawkinses, and Murphys, would have had no shield.

I do not know how Cowper felt: he had not yet broke forth into fame, and perhaps was too meek to have then dared an opinion of his own; but he has left many proofs that he was a devoted admirer of Milton. I was a boy when the life of Milton came out; though the lives of the more modern poets appeared after I arrived at Cambridge; and then my indignation at the attacks on Collins and Gray rose to a height which has never since subsided.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## ON MILTON'S SONNETS.

THE Sonnets are another object of Johnson's virulent attack: they have a character of their own, supported for the most part by a naked majesty of thought. The model is drawn from the Italians; and Milton's favourite, Dante, set him the example. He took little from the tone of Petrarch: he has none of Petrarch's sweetness. The sternness, severity, gloominess, and sublimity of Dante had his entire sympathy. The English reader may find specimens of Dante's manner in his Sonnets, excellently translated by Hayley, in the notes to his poem on Epic Poetry: I must admit that, in the Sonnets, Milton has not reached his model.

The brevity of the Sonnet will scarcely admit the greater traits of poetry: there is no space for fable; but for the preservation of a single grand thought it is admirably fitted. Mr. Dyce, in his 'Specimens of English Sonnets, from the time of Henry VIII., chronologically arranged,' has shown their progress and their fashions. They

were favourites with Spenser and Shakspeare, and many less eminent poets of those days ; as, Sydney, Constable, B. Barnes, Daniel, and Drayton. It appears to me that the Sonnets both of Spenser and Shakspeare have been commended too much : they are quaint, laboured, and often metaphysical. Of all authors, Wordsworth has most succeeded in this department.

But there are many of Milton's which are very grand in their nakedness : they have little of picturesque imagery. To make use once more of an expression of Johnson—not as applied to them, but to other parts of Milton—their sublimity is argumentative : it is intellectual and spiritual. There is something at times of ruggedness and involution in the words : they rarely flow. They are spoken as by one, who, conscious of the force of the thought, scorns ornament ; they have something of the brevity and the dictatorial tone of the oracle, and seem to come from one who feels conscious that he is entitled to authority. Compositions so short can only have weight when they come from established names : every word ought to be pregnant with mind, with thought, sentiment, or imagery. The form will not allow diffuseness and smooth diluted periods : the repetition of the rhymes certainly aggravates the difficulty.

If it can be shown that in any one of these Sonnets of Milton there is not much sterling ore, I will give it up. In all there is some important thought, or opinion, or sentiment developed. The



modulation may sometimes appear rough to delicate and sickly ears; and there is not the nice polish of a lady's gem come from a refining jeweller's workshop: it is all massy gold,—not fillagreed away into petty ornaments.

¶ The Sonnet on Cromwell is majestic;—on his blindness, sublime;—on his twenty-second birthday, both pathetic and exalted: others are moral and axiomatic; and others descriptive. Not one is a mere effusion of idle words or insipid common-place; not one has the appearance of being written for the sake of writing. |

The necessity of compression gives this form of composition a great merit, when the fountain of the writer's mind is abundant. It is true, that in this short space, barrenness itself can find enough to fill up the outline; but in Milton there is no unmeaning sentence or useless word.

The form of the Sonnet, however, does not refuse mellifluousness when the occasion requires, as Petrarch almost every where proves. No verses can be more mellifluous than Petrarch's: something of this will, perhaps, be attributed to the softness of the Italian language; but the English tongue is also capable of it, however obstinately Johnson may have pronounced otherwise. Milton had no Laura to flatter and idolise: he found in his wife a dull, insensate, and capricious woman, unwarmed by his genius, and inapprehensive of his moral qualities: his admiration turned to disgust, and his resentment to bitterness.

One may conceive that his genius might have

thrown more of the splendour of imagination into his Sonnets: single images, such as are scattered through all the rest of his poetry, might have been thrown into a succession of these small forms, and might have risen by a noble climax to their termination.

If there was one poetical power of Milton more eminent than another, it was his power of description: he gave an idealism to all his material images; and yet they were in the highest degree distinct and picturesque. He knew where to throw a veil, and when to make the features prominent. A poetical image should have the distinctness which a painter can depict; but it should have also something of the indefinite, which a painter cannot depict:—this is Milton's merit; and it is no less that of Dante. It is what art can never reach; what genius only gives by flashes: it is enthusiasm and inspiration.

The question at present is, not whether the Sonnets are equal to Milton's genius, but whether they are good, or as contemptible as Johnson represents them. I say that they are such as none but Milton could have written: they are full of lofty thought, moral instruction, and virtuous sentiment, expressed in language as strong as it is plain. They are pictures of a manly, resolute, inflexible spirit, and aid us in our knowledge of the poet's individual character. Is this light merit?—Where is the enlightened reader who will agree with Johnson, and wish them thrown aside?

But Johnson's prejudices against Milton were

inveterate : they must have been taken up early in life from some passion, and have grown with his growth. He never ridded himself of the impressions he imbibed from Lander : his hatred, however, was partly political. I know not what made him so bigoted and blind a partisan : his birth and station will not account for it ;—probably it was imbibed jacobitism. But there was something adverse in the native structure of the minds of these two celebrated men : if Johnson had genius, it was quite dissimilar to that of Milton : it was solely argumentative : he had no inventive imagination : he saw no phantoms but the gloomy phantoms of superstition : he had no chivalrous enthusiasm : he delighted not to gaze on feudal halls, or “ throngs of knights and barons bold : ” he thought not of another world ; of angels, and heavenly splendour, but as subjects of trembling and painful-awe ! He turned away from them, except so far as duty enforced his attention : he loved the world, and all its gaieties, and follies, and conflicts.

Could there be a greater contrast to the bard of ‘ Paradise Lost ’ and ‘ Paradise Regained ? ’ To him who would decapitate kings, and defy the powers of the earth ? To him who would haunt groves and forests, and listen to the lonely blast, and busy himself in deep solitude, and love musing and his own creations, rather than the busy talk of social collision ? Him, whose taste is opposed to our own, and from its elevation claims a superiority, we learn first to envy, then to hate,

then to scorn. Till we can persuade ourselves that he is in the wrong, we feel our own degradation. Thus Johnson, when he was grasping at the head seat of the literature of his country, could not bear the memory of one whose dissimilar splendour paled his own; hence his constant detractions, his petty cavils, his malignant perversions.

To dwell on this topic is not idle or irrelevant: Johnson still holds the public ear; and to endeavour to weaken his influence is a duty neither useless nor ungenerous. The more the public studies and admires Milton, the higher will be its taste and grasp of intellect.

As to the Sonnets, if any one can read them without both pleasurable excitation and improvement, he has a sort of mind which it would be vain to attempt to cultivate—a barren soil, or one overgrown with weeds and prejudices.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## ON 'SAMSON AGONISTES.'

WE come again to fable and invention. 'Samson Agonistes' is written after the severe model of the ancient Greek tragedies; but it is not fit for the stage, nor intended for it: the characters are few; it indeed almost approaches to a monologue. Many object to the chorus; but for a dramatic poem it affords many opportunities of noble eloquence. Samson's character is magnificently supported: he is a giant in mind as well as in body: his language, though not suited to the effeminate polish of modern ears, is vigorous and majestic.

There is a deep pathos, but unyielding soul, in all the hero utters: the moral reflections are grand, profound, and expansive. The application every where to the poet's own misfortunes and position augments the interest twofold.

Milton, in his preface to this poem, says:—"Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems; therefore said by

Aristotle to be of power, by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions; that is, to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirred up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated." &c.

On this Warton makes the following note:—"Milton, who was inclined to puritanism, had good reason to think that the publication of his 'Samson Agonistes' would be very offensive to his brethren, who held poetry, and particularly that of the dramatic kind, in the greatest abhorrence: and upon that account, it is probable, that in order to excuse himself from having engaged in this proscribed and forbidden species of writing, he thought it expedient to prefix to his play a formal defence of tragedy."

Such defence of what does not require to be defended never makes impression upon bigoted minds. The blind slaves of party are never convinced by reason; they repeat by rote, and cannot be put out of their lesson.

Long speeches on the stage become tedious; but are not so to the intelligent reader: and there is no mode by which an ideal character can be represented with so much effect. A person under the influence of passion can best describe his own feelings: we cannot conceive any thing more heroic than much of what is said by Samson.

In accordance with some celebrated critics, I have no doubt that the third place of excellence

in Milton's works ought to be assigned to 'Samson Agonistes'—placing the 'Paradise Lost' first, and 'Paradise Regained' second. Though 'Comus' is exquisite poetry, it has not so much grandeur and holiness: it certainly is more purely imaginative; but then we must consider the compound of the four great essentials; and we must always prefer sublimity to sweetness. To live among the nymphs and dryads is delightful; but moral heroism is more delightful. One is duty; the other is only pleasure.

We are entitled to amuse ourselves by sometimes living in a purely visionary world; but sometimes also we are called upon to perform our part among the human inhabitants of the solid earth: and the grandeur of bold enterprise, or patient suffering, has a longer, deeper, and more instructive hold upon the mind, than any simple and unmixed play upon the fancy or the senses.

The 'Comus' is the work of a younger man, full of hope, elasticity, and joy: the tragedy is the pouring out of one enriched by the wisdom of age and experience, mellowed by misfortune, and elevated by patience under danger and calumny;—of one "fallen on evil tongues and evil days;"—of one resolved to lift himself above sublunary oppression, and rising in grandeur in proportion to the severity of his trials.

We muse in this tragedy upon the great bard mingling his ideal inventions with his own personal gloomy recollections and his present sorrows

and privations. We trace the workings of his heroic spirit; and we see the sublime picture of lofty virtue and splendid genius "struggling with the storms of fate."

The temperament of poetry is heat and exhalation: it throws out flashes, of which labour and art cannot supply scintillæ. Its warmth and tone communicate its contagion to others. Whatever there is of artificial and mechanical attempt to produce this effect on others, fails, and ends in nothing. It is like dead air, whence we draw no healthful breath.

No one can write with the powers of a poet except when he is in a state of excitement. All must be centred within him:—there the fire must burn and blaze. He must see with the mental eye, and pore, and believe. Language will accompany this state of spiritualism without being searched for. If the thought does not predominate over the expression, it is not only charmless, but weak and faulty:—

Cold as the snow upon Canadian hills,  
It wakes no spark within, but chills the heart.

The spell comes from the imagination:—there can be no warmth in literary composition where there is no imagination.

The force and brightness of the fire is in proportion to the richness and abundance of the fuel applied to it. Milton applied all invention, all wisdom, all learning, and all knowledge.

Perhaps we must bring to the reading of



Milton much greatness of spirit, a strong and unsophisticated fancy—much erudition, and much power of thought, to enable us thoroughly to taste and admire him. In this he differs from Shakspeare, who is equally fitted for the people, and for the most radiant and most cultivated minds. One can scarcely deny that this is a superiority in Shakspeare: Milton could not have been what he was without the aid of intense study; but as Milton could not have done what Shakspeare did, so Shakspeare could not have done what Milton did. To have produced ‘*Samson Agonistes*’ would have been utterly beyond Shakspeare’s reach: Shakspeare, however, would have given more variety of characters, and richness and contrast of incidents: he would have drawn Dalilah more inviting, and Samson more tender: his language would have been more flowing—more vernacular; and if not so sublime, more beautiful: it would have sunk with less consideration, and more immediately into people’s hearts.—‘*Samson Agonistes*’ is for study, and not to be lightly perused. But let no scholar—let no magnanimous-souled being, who understands the English language, and has any tincture of education, omit to read it, and muse upon it again and again, and lay it up in the treasured stores of his memory: it will exercise and improve all his intellectual faculties, and elevate his heart:—it has at once novelty, truth, and wisdom. He may learn by it lessons for the great affairs of life, enlarge his comprehension, and fortify his bosom.

He may be taught that sublimity and strength of language lie not in glitter or floweriness;—that strength is naked, and boldness of conception can support itself.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## CONCLUSION.

I HAVE thus given my opinion distinctively of Milton's epic, dramatic, and lyrical genius. I have done it sincerely, without exaggeration, and, after a habit of considering the subject for many years, with an earnest desire to form a right judgment.

To praise upon mere authority can answer no good purpose; the repetition of false praise will add to its nauseousness: but there can be no certainty of merit, unless we strictly establish principles which shall become a test to it. The endless diversity of capricious opinion puts every thing afloat: we can trust to nothing but the concurrence of all ages and all nations. If, therefore, we find that what was laid down by Aristotle has received the sanction of posterity under all changes of manners and varieties of countries, reason enjoins us to rely upon it as truth: I take, therefore, Aristotle's four requisites of good poetry to be undeniable. By these rules Milton must ever stand where he has been placed—at the head

of his art, if art it may be called. But the extraordinary thing is, that he has no second in this combination of merits,—that he stands alone!

There are those whom this will offend; but it is the stern truth. If fable, in the sense in which Aristotle uses it, is a necessary essential, the conclusion is incontrovertible.

Of all the fifty-two poets whose *Lives* have been written by Johnson, and of whom not less than seventeen are mere versifiers, and several of them mediocre versifiers,—Dryden and Pope stand, in common estimation, next to Milton. But however I may sin against the popular opinion, I persevere in saying that they are deficient in this first essential, to which I have alluded: I assert that they have no poetical invention. Pope's '*Rape of the Lock*' will scarcely be objected to me; nor Dryden's '*Fables*,' which are all borrowed.

Sir William Temple's observation of the rarity of poetical genius, so often cited, is thus verified. Single qualities may not be uncommon; it is the union of all the essentials which so seldom occurs. Milton had them all; and each in the most eminent degree. Pope may be said to have had the last three: Dryden wanted the first, and, perhaps, the third.

So far as poetry is to be considered not only the voice of pleasure but the voice of wisdom, whatever fiction is contrary to probability, is not only not praiseworthy, but culpable. It justly brings poetry into contempt, and gives it the

name of an idle, empty art. I prefer even insipidity and triteness to extravagance; the effort to surprise is always vicious. The poet's business is to exhibit nature, but nature in an exalted state: hence I cannot approve Crabbe's poetry, however true to life his descriptions may be. On the other hand, I must admit that Byron in his fictions goes sometimes far beyond nature.

These are small names, even the last, to mention after Milton, whose fables utter the songs of angels and archangels; and whose sanctity, elevated into the highest sublimity, keeps due music with the choirs of Heaven! Not but Byron might, if he had been equally devout, have followed Milton in this track.

I am conscious what talents far above mine it requires to treat adequately the subject I have here undertaken: but others, as weak as I am, have already entered on the task with less respectfulness and less love, and I am willing to attempt to wipe away some of the stains they have left. For fifty years I have had an unquenchable desire to refute Johnson's perverse criticisms and malignant obloquies. I know not by what spell his authority over the public is still great. To almost every new edition of Milton, except Todd's and Mitford's, Johnson's *Life of the Poet* has continued to be reprinted. This repetition surely becomes nauseous.

But he who gains novelty at the expense of truth, pays too dear for it; and gains what is not worth having. Nothing is more easy than to sti-

multate for a moment by what is new, though unfounded: but sobriety of judgment, and nicety of taste, must give their sanction to what is pronounced. All inconsiderate and unmeasured praise is hurtful.

I have forborne to commend any composition of this mighty poet without long and calm thought. I have considered that the powers of Johnson entitled him to a cool and careful consideration before I ought to venture to contradict his opinion; but that, when I could no longer doubt, no force of authority ought to restrain my expression.

But much greater authority than Johnson's on a poetical question is on my side:—Dryden, Addison, Gray, the Wartons, Cowper, Hayley, and innumerable others.

It would be almost superfluous to say more of Milton's merits as a poet, after all that I have said: recapitulation in his case would probably weaken its effect. He had not only every requisite of the Muse; but every one of the highest order, and in the highest degree. His invention of poetical fable, and poetical imagery, was exhaustless, and always grand, and always consistent with the faith of a cultivated and sensitive mind. Sublimity was his primary and unfailing power. His characters were new, surprising, gigantic, or beautiful; and full of instruction, such as high wisdom sanctioned. His sentiments were lofty, comprehensive, eloquent, consistent, holy, original; and an amalgamation of spirit, religion,

intellect, and marvellous learning. His language was his own : sometimes a little rough and unvarnished ; but as magnificent as his mind : of pregnant thought ; naked in its strength ; rich and picturesque, where imagery was required ; often exquisitely harmonious, where the occasion permitted ; but sometimes strong, mighty, and speaking with the voice of thunder.

I can scarcely go further, to constitute the greatest poet of our nation, and, in my opinion, of the world : for surely, taking dignity of fable and other characters into the question, Homer and Virgil cannot be compared with Milton ! And, to fortify me, Addison and Dryden have come to the same conclusion.

In moral character the poet stands among the noblest and the best. His spirit was as holy, and his heart as sanctified, as his writings : for this we must admit the testimony of his own repeated declaration in the face of malignant enemies, and the foulest passion of detraction. But, as humanity cannot be perfect, he was provoked by diabolical slander into recriminations unbecoming the dignity of his supreme genius, and devout heart. His politics were severe, and, in my apprehension, wrong ; but they were conscientious. The principles which he entertained, the boldness of his mind pushed to an unlimited and terrible extent : and thus he was brought to justify the decapitation of Charles I. I would forget this, if I could ; because, remembering it, I cannot but

confess that I feel it a cloud upon his dazzling glory: but as Horsley said on another occasion:—

One passing vapour shall dissolve away,  
And leave thy glory's unobstructed ray!

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## A P P E N D I X.

### No. I.

#### MEMORANDA RELATING TO THE FAMILY OF POWELL OF FOREST-HILL, OXFORDSHIRE.

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“Milton married, in 1643, a daughter of Justice Powell of Sandford, in the vicinity of Oxford, and lived in a house at Forest-hill, about three miles from Oxford.”

TODD'S LIFE OF MILTON, vol. i, p. 25, ed. 1809.

NOTHING can possibly be more erroneous. The families of Powell, alias ap Howell, of Sandford, and Powell of Forest-hill, were not in the remotest degree connected: the former were Roman Catholics. Milton's first wife was Mary, daughter of Richard Powell of Forest-hill. About twenty years ago, the writer, being strongly impressed with the incorrectness of the above statement, and residing for a few months at Oxford, compiled a pedigree of the family of Powell of Sandford, by which the fact is proved to demonstration. There were then no memorials of the family in the church of Forest-hill; and the earliest register commencing A. D. 1700, no notice respecting them could be gleaned from that source.

It is probable they came gradually into prosperity under the wings of the Bromes. One Richard Powell is “remembered” as a “ser-

vant" (perhaps bailiff or steward) under the will of George Brome of Halton, and is mentioned before the testator's armourer.

Richard Powell of Forest-hill, and Sir Edward Master of Ospringe in Kent, were executors under the will of George Brome's widow, Eliz. (made 8th September, 1629) proved February 6th, 1634-5.

The will of Edmund Brome of Forest-hill, made November 8th, 1625, was proved August 12th, 1628, by Richard Powell, (sole executor,) Milton's father-in-law. There is no pedigree of the family to be met with; but the following are some memoranda respecting the will of Richard Powell of Forest-hill, Esq., made December 30th, 1646, proved March 26th, 1647, by his widow, Anne; and on May 10th, 1662, by his son Richard; by which act the effect of the power so given to the mother was done away with.

One of the attesting witnesses was John Milton, his son-in-law; but the original will not being now (1831) at Doctors' Commons, curiosity will be disappointed in the expectation of seeing the poet's handwriting.

The testator names as executor, in the first place, his eldest son Richard; and in the second, in case of said Richard's unwillingness to act, his wife Anne; and in the third place, in case of said Anne being unwilling to do so, his friend Mr. John Ellstone of Forest-hill, to whom he gives twenty shillings for a ring. He appoints as overseers his loving friends Sir John Curson and

Sir Robert Pye, Knights, and gives to them twenty shillings each for a ring.

He devises his house, &c., at Forest-hill, (alias Forsthall) and alludes to his recently compounding for the same at Goldsmith's Hall, to his eldest son Richard; subject, however, to as follows:— Payment of debts and funeral expenses, &c., satisfying a bond to Anne his, the testator's, wife, in reference to her jointure, and which the testator was not able at that period (1646) to discharge out of his personal property; and the remainder was then to be divided into two parts: one of them to belong to the said Richard, and the other to be divided among such of his brothers and sisters as might not have been already, at the time of the testator's decease, provided for; and the sisters to have one-third more apiece than their brothers.

The testator desires that his daughter, Milton, may be had regard to, as to the sufficiency of her portion; and more, if his, the testator's, estate will bear it.

His houses and lands at Wheatley, and all other properties of the testator, not so above specifically bequeathed, &c., are given to his said son Richard.

The marriage portion, £1000, promised to John Milton by his father-in-law, was never paid, according to the biographies of the poet. His distresses in the royal cause prevented, probably, the payment of it.

[I am indebted for this information to the kindness of Mr. Frederick Holbrooke, of Parkhurst, Bexley.—Ed.]

## No. II.

## DESCENDANTS OF MILTON.\*

“MILTON’s direct descendants can only exist, if they exist at all, among the posterity of his youngest and favourite daughter Deborah, afterwards Mrs. Clarke, a woman of cultivated understanding, and not unpleasing manners, known to Richardson and Professor Ward, and patronized by Addison, who intended to have procured a permanent provision for her, and presented with fifty guineas by Queen Caroline. Her affecting exclamation is well known, on seeing her father’s portrait for the first time more than thirty years after his death:—“Oh, my father, my dear father!” “She spoke of him,” says Richardson, “with great tenderness; she said he was delightful company, the life of the conversation, not only by a flow of subject, but by unaffected cheerfulness and civility.” This is the character of him whom Dr. Johnson represents as a morose tyrant, drawn by one of the supposed victims of his domestic oppression.

\* From a Critique on Godwin’s ‘Lives of Milton’s Nephews,’ in *Edinburgh Review*, No. L.

“ Her daughter, Mrs. Foster, for whose benefit Dr. Newton and Dr. Birch procured Comus to be acted, survived all her children. The only child of Deborah Milton, of whom we have any accounts besides Mr. Foster, was Caleb Clarke, who went to Madras in the first years of the eighteenth century, and who then vanishes from the view of the biographers of Milton. We have been enabled, by accident, to enlarge a very little this appendage to his history. It appears from an examination of the parish register of Fort St. George, that Caleb Clarke, who seems to have been parish-clerk of that place, from 1717 to 1719, was buried there on the 26th of October of the latter year. By his wife Mary, whose original surname does not appear, he had three children born at Madras:—Abraham, baptized on the 2nd of June, 1703; Mary, baptized on the 17th of March, 1706, and buried on December the 15th of the same year; and Isaac, baptized the 13th of February, 1711. Of Isaac no further account appears. Abraham, the great-grandson of Milton, in September, 1725, married Anna Clarke; and the baptism of his daughter, Mary Clarke, is registered on the 2nd of April, 1727. With her all notices of this family cease. But as neither he nor any of his family, nor his brother Isaac, died at Madras, and as he was only twenty-four years of age at the baptism of his daughter, it is probable that the family migrated to some other part of India, and that some trace of them might yet be discovered by examination of the parish

registers of Calcutta and Bombay. If they had returned to England, they could not have escaped the curiosity of the admirers and historians of Milton. We cannot apologize for the minuteness of this genealogy, or for the eagerness of our desire that it should be enlarged. We profess that superstitious veneration for the memory of that greatest of poets, which regards the slightest relic of him as sacred; and we cannot conceive either true poetical sensibility, or a just sense of the glory of England, to belong to that Englishman, who would not feel the strongest emotions at the sight of a descendant of Milton, discovered in the person even of the most humble and unlettered of human beings.”\*

\* While the grandson of Milton resided at Madras, in a condition so humble as to make the office of parish-clerk an object of ambition, it is somewhat remarkable that the elder brother of Addison should have been the governor of that settlement. The Honourable Galston Addison died there in the year 1709.

## No. III.

MILTON'S AGREEMENT WITH MR. SYMONS  
FOR PARADISE LOST.

DATED 27TH APRIL, 1667.

‘ These Presents made the 27th day of April 1667 between John Milton, gent. of the one part, and Samuel Symons, printer, of the other part, wittness That the said John Milton in consideration of five pounds to him now paid by the said Samuel Symōns, and other the consideracōns herein mentioned, hath given, granted and assigned, and by these pūts doth give, grant and assign unto the said Sam<sup>ll</sup> Symōns, his executors and assignees, All that Booke, Copy, or Manuscript of a Poem intituled Paradise Lost, or by whatsoever other title or name the same is or shall be called or distinguished, now lately licensed to be printed, together w<sup>th</sup> the full benefitt, profit, and advantage thereof, or w<sup>ch</sup> shall or may arise thereby. And the said John Milton for him, his ex<sup>rs</sup> and adm<sup>rs</sup>, doth covenant w<sup>th</sup> the said Sam<sup>ll</sup> Symōns, his ex<sup>rs</sup> and ass<sup>s</sup>, that he and they shall at all times hereafter have, hold and enjoy the same and all impressions thereof accordingly, without the lett or hindrance of him the said John Milton, his ex<sup>rs</sup> or ass<sup>s</sup>, or any person or persons by his or their consent or privity. And that he the said John Milton, his ex<sup>rs</sup> or adm<sup>rs</sup>, or any other by his or their meanes or consent, shall not print or cause to be printed, or sell, dispose or publish the said book or manuscript, or any other book or manuscript of the same tenor or subject, without the consent of the said Sam<sup>ll</sup> Symōns, his ex<sup>rs</sup> or ass<sup>s</sup>: In concideracon whereof the said Sam<sup>ell</sup> Symōns for him, his ex<sup>rs</sup> and adm<sup>rs</sup>, doth covenant with the said John Milton, his ex<sup>rs</sup> and ass<sup>s</sup>, well and truly to pay unto the

said John Milton, his ex<sup>rs</sup> and adm<sup>rs</sup>, the sum of five pounds of lawfull english money at the end of the first Impression, which the said Sam<sup>ll</sup> Symōns, his ex<sup>rs</sup> or ass<sup>s</sup>, shall make and publish of the said copy or manuscript, which impression shall be accounted to be ended when thirteen hundred books of the said whole copy or manuscript imprinted, shall be sold and retailed off to particular reading customers. And shall also pay other five pounds, unto the said John Milton, or his ass<sup>s</sup>, at the end of the second impression to be accounted as aforesaid, And five pounds more at the end of the third impression, to be in like manner accounted. And that the said three first impressions shall not exceed fifteen hundred books or volumes of the said whole copy or manuscript, a piece. And further, that he the said Samuel Symons, and his ex<sup>rs</sup>, adm<sup>rs</sup>, and ass<sup>s</sup> shall be ready to make oath before a Master in Chancery concerning his or their knowledge and belief of or concerning the truth of the disposing and selling the said books by retail, as aforesaid, whereby the said Mr. Milton is to be entitled to his said money from time to time, upon every reasonable request in that behalf, or in default thereof shall pay the said five pounds agreed to be paid upon every impression, as aforesaid, as if the same were due, and for and in lieu thereof. In witness whereof, the said parties have to this writing indented, interchangeably sett their hands and seales the day and yeare first above written.

JOHN MILTON. (Seal).

Sealed and delivered in the presence of us,	}	John Fisher. Benjamin Greene, serv <sup>t</sup> to Mr. Milton.
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April 26. 1669.

Rec<sup>d</sup> then of Samuel Simmons five pounds, being the Second five pounds to be paid—mentioned in the Covenant. I say rec<sup>d</sup> by me,

JOHN MILTON.

Witness, Edmund Upton.



I do hereby acknowledge to have received of Samuel Symonds Cittizen and Statōner of London, the Sum of Eight pounds: which is in full payment for all my right, title, or interest, which I have or ever had in the Coppy of a Poem Intitled Paradise Lost in Twelve Bookes in 8vo—By John Milton, Gent. my late husband. Wittness my hand this 21<sup>st</sup> day of December 1680.

ELIZABETH MILTON.

Wittness, William Yopp, Ann Yopp.

Know all men by these pssents that I Elizabeth Milton of London Widdow, late wife of John Milton of London Gent: deceased—have remissed released and for ever quitt claimed And by these pssents doe remise release & for ever quitt clayme unto Samuel Symonds of London, Printer—his heirs Execut<sup>rs</sup> and Administrators All and all manner of Accoñ and Accoñs Cause and Causes of Accoñ Suites Bills Bonds writinges obligatorie Debts dues duties Accompts Summe and Sumes of money Judgments Executions Extents Quarrells either in Law or Equity Controversies and demands—And all & every other matter cause and thing whatsoever which against the said Samuel Symonds—I ever had and which I my heires Executors or Administrators shall or may have clayme & challenge or demand for or by reason or means of any matters cause or thing whatsoever from the beginning of the World unto the day of these pssents. In witness whereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale the twenty-ninth day of April in the thirty-third Year of the Reigne of our Sovereign Lord Charles by the grace of God of England Scotland ffance and Ireland King defender of the ffaith & Anno Dni. 1681.

ELIZABETH MILTON.

Signed and delivered  
in the pssence of  
Jos. Leigh W<sup>m</sup>. Wilkins.

## No. IV.

## COWLEY'S PREFACE TO HIS POEMS,

1656.

It has been already observed that Cowley had scarcely opportunity to become acquainted with the early poems of Milton; and his party attachments prevented even a wish for personal intimacy; he was engaged besides on active, sometimes foreign service, and, if he read the 'Defensio' of the great republican, in all probability read it with horror.

Yet we find on authority not to be questioned, that Milton spoke of Cowley as a poet whom he valued, and named him with Spenser and Shakspeare. This is the more surprising, as Cowley was by ten years the younger man, and his writings had never appeared in body till 1656, when he returned to England from the Continent, and published them in folio. This volume was, there can be no question, read to Milton in his blindness: the congeniality of their studies, and their religious feelings, led him to estimate highly the only rival that Cambridge had bred to him in Latin verse; and though unnoticed in the volume upon his table, the PREFACE spoke to him, as by the inspiration of Urania herself. Let the reader

imagine the blind bard listening to the following exquisite admonitions, which he alone fully comprehended ; and the expectations which of all mankind he only could gratify ; and upon which he was then earnestly and silently meditating :

“ When I consider how many bright and magnificent subjects the holy Scripture affords and proffers, as it were, to poesy, in the wise managing and illustrating whereof, the glory of God Almighty might be joined with the singular utility and noblest delight of mankind ; it is not without grief and indignation that I behold that divine science employing all her inexhaustible riches of wit and eloquence, either in the wicked and beggarly flattery of great persons, or the unmanly idolizing of foolish women, or the wretched affectation of scurril laughter, or at best on the confused antiquated dreams of senseless fables and metamorphoses. Amongst all holy and consecrated things, which the devil ever stole and alienated from the service of the Deity ; as altars, temples, sacrifices, prayers, and the like ; there is none that he so universally, and so long usurped, as poetry. It is time to recover it out of the tyrant’s hands, and to restore it to the kingdom of God, who is the father of it. It is time to baptize it in Jordan, for it will never become clean by bathing in the water of Damascus. There wants, methinks, but the conversion of that, and the Jews, for the accomplishment of the kingdom of Christ. And as men, before their receiving of the faith, do not without some carnal

reluctancies apprehend the bonds and fetters of it, but find it afterwards to be the truest and greatest liberty; it will fare no otherwise with this art, after the regeneration of it: it will meet with wonderful variety of new, more beautiful, and more delightful objects; neither will it want room, by being confined to heaven. There is not so great a lie to be found in any poet, as the vulgar conceit of men, that lying is essential to good poetry. Were there never so wholesome nourishment to be had (but alas, it breathes nothing but diseases) out of these boasted feasts of love and fables; yet, methinks, the unalterable continuance of the diet should make us nauseate it: for it is almost impossible to serve up any new dish of that kind. They are all but the cold meats of the ancients, new-heated, and new set forth. I do not at all wonder that the old poets made some rich crops out of these grounds; the heart of the soil was not then wrought out with continual tillage: but what can we expect now, who come a gleanings, not after the first reapers, but after the very beggars? Besides, though those mad stories of the gods and heroes seem in themselves so ridiculous; yet they were in the whole body (or rather chaos) of the theology of those times. They were believed by all but a few philosophers, and perhaps some atheists, and served to good purpose among the vulgar (as pitiful things as they are), in strengthening the authority of law with the terrors of conscience, and expectation of certain rewards,

and unavoidable punishments. There was no other religion ; and therefore that was better than none at all : but to us, who have no need of them ; to us, who deride their folly, and are wearied with their impertinencies ; they ought to appear no better arguments for verse, than those of their worthy successors, the knights errant. What can we imagine more proper for the ornaments of wit or learning in the story of Deucalion than in that of Noah ? Why will not the actions of Samson afford as plentiful matter as the labours of Hercules ? Why is not Jephthah's daughter as good a woman as Iphigenia ? and the friendship of David and Jonathan more worthy celebration than that of Theseus and Pirithous ? Does not the passage of Moses and the Israelites into the Holy Land yield incomparably more poetical variety than the voyages of Ulysses or Æneas ? Are the obsolete thread-bare tales of Thebes and Troy half so stored with great, heroic, and supernatural actions (since verse will needs find or make such) as the wars of Joshua, of the Judges, of David, and divers others ? Can all the transformations of the gods give such copious hints to flourish and expatiate on, as the true miracles of Christ, or of his prophets and apostles ? What do I instance in these few particulars ? All the books of the Bible are either already most admirable and exalted pieces of poesy, or are the best materials in the world for it. Yet, though they be in themselves so proper to be made use of for this purpose ; none but a

good artist will know how to do it: neither must we think to cut and polish diamonds with so little pains and skill as we do marble: for, if any man design to compose a sacred poem, by only turning a story of the scripture, like Mr. Quarles's, or some other godly matter, like Mr. Heywood of angels, into rhyme; he is so far from elevating of poesy, that he only abases divinity. In brief, he who can write a profane poem well, may write a divine one better; but he who can do that but ill, will do this much worse. The same fertility of invention; the same wisdom of disposition; the same judgment in observance of decencies; the same lustre and vigour of elocution; the same modesty and majesty of number; briefly, the same kind of habit is required to both: only this latter allows better stuff, and therefore would look more deformedly ill dressed in it. I am far from assuming to myself to have fulfilled the duty of this weighty undertaking: but sure I am, there is nothing yet in our language (nor perhaps in any) that is in any degree answerable to the idea that I conceive of it. And I shall be ambitious of no other fruit from this weak and imperfect attempt of mine, but the opening of a way to the courage and industry of some other persons, who may be better able to perform it thoroughly and successfully."

Such were the suggestions of that amiable and excellent writer, and such the soil on which this broad-cast of celestial seed was thrown. What a subject of regret that he should have died, with-

out seeing the work he was so modest as to expect from another and superior Muse ! He died on the 28th of July, '1667, in the 49th year of his age ; and the 'Paradise Lost' was then just issuing from the press.

## SELECTED ENCOMIASTIC LINES.

BARROW.\*

QUI legis Amissam Paradisum, grandia magni  
Carmina Miltoni, quid nisi cuncta legis?  
Res cunctas, et cunctarum primordia rerum,  
Et fata, et fines continet iste liber.  
Intima panduntur magni penetralia mundi,  
Scribitur et toto quicquid in orbe latet:  
Terræque, tractusque maris, cælumque profundum,  
Sulphureumque Erebi, flammivomumque specus:  
Quæque colunt terras, pontumque et Tartara cæca;  
Quæque colunt summi lucida regna poli:  
Et quodcunque ullis conclusum est finibus usquam,  
Et sine fine Chaos, et sine fine Deus;  
Et sine fine magis, si quid magis est sine fine,  
In Christo erga homines conciliatus amor.  
Hæc qui speraret quis crederet esse futurum?  
Et tamen hæc hodie terra Britanna legit.  
O, quantos in bella duces! quæ protulit arma!  
Quæ canit, et quanta, prælia dira tuba!

\* In Paradisum Amissam Summi Poetæ Johannis Miltoni.



Cœlestes acies ! atque in certamine cœlum !  
Et quæ cœlestes pugna deceret agros !  
Quantus in æthereis tollit se Lucifer armis !  
Atque ipso graditur vix Michaelē minor !  
Quantis, et quam funestis concurritur iris,  
Dum ferus hic stellas protegit, ille rapit !  
Dum vulsos montes ceu tela reciproca torquent,  
Et non mortali desuper igne pluunt :  
Stat dubius cui se parti concedat Olympus,  
Et metuit pugnæ non superesse suæ.  
At simul in cœlis Messiae insignia fulgent,  
Et currus animas, armaque digna Deo,  
Horrendumque rotæ strident, et sæva rotarum  
Erumpunt torvis fulgura luminibus,  
Et flammæ vibrant, et vera tonitrua rauco  
Admistis flammis insonuere polo ;  
Excidit attonitis mens omnis, et impetus omnis,  
Et cassis dextris irrita tela cadunt.  
Ad pœnas fugiunt ; et, ceu foret Orcus asylum,  
Infernīs certant condere se tenebris.  
Cedite, Romani scriptores ; cedite, Graii ;  
Et quos fama recens vel celebravit anus.  
Hæc quicumque leget tantum cecinisse putabit  
Mæonidem ranas, Virgilium culices.

## ANDREW MARVELL.\*

WHEN I beheld the poet blind, yet bold,  
In slender book his vast design unfold,  
Messiah crown'd, God's reconciled decree,  
Rebelling angels, the forbidden tree,  
Heaven, hell, earth, chaos, all; the argument  
Held me awhile misdoubting his intent,  
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)  
The sacred truths to Fable and old song;  
(So Samson groped the temple's posts in spite)  
The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight.

Yet as I read, still growing less severe,  
I liked his project, the success did fear;  
Through that wide field how he his way should  
find  
O'er which lame faith leads understanding blind;  
Lest he perplex'd the things he would explain,  
And what was easy he should render vain.  
Or if a work so infinite he spann'd,  
Jealous I was, that some less skilful hand  
(Such as disquiet always what is well,  
And, by ill imitating, would excel,)  
Might hence presume the whole Creation's day  
To change in scenes, and show it in a play.

Pardon me, mighty Poet, nor despise  
My causeless, yet not impious, surmise:  
But I am now convinced; and none will dare  
Within thy labours to pretend to share.

\* Address to Milton on reading *Paradise Lost*.

Thou hast not miss'd one thought that could be fit,  
And all that was improper dost omit:  
So that no room is here for writers left,  
But to detect their ignorance or theft.

That majesty, which through thy work doth  
    reign,  
Draws the devout, deterring the profane :  
And things divine thou treat'st of in such state,  
As them preserves, and thee, inviolate.  
At once delight and horror on us seize,  
Thou sing'st with so much gravity and ease ;  
And above human flight dost soar aloft  
With plume so strong, so equal, and so soft :  
The bird, named from that Paradise you sing,  
So never flags, but always keeps on wing.

Where couldst thou words of such a compass  
    find ?  
Whence furnish such a vast expanse of mind ?  
Just Heaven thee, like Tiresias, to requite,  
Rewards with prophecy thy loss of sight.

Well mightst thou scorn thy readers to allure  
With tinkling rhyme, of thy own sense secure ;  
While the Town-Bays writes all the while and  
    spells,  
And, like a pack-horse, tires without his bells :  
Their fancies like our bushy points appear ;  
The poets tag them, we for fashion wear.  
I too, transported by the mode, offend ;  
And, while I meant to praise thee, must com-  
    mend :

Thy verse, created, like thy theme, sublime,  
In number, weight, and measure, needs not rhyme.

## DRYDEN.\*

THREE Poets, in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England did adorn :  
The first in loftiness of thought surpass'd ;  
The next, in majesty ; in both, the last.  
The force of nature could no farther go :  
To make a third, she join'd the former two.

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## ADDISON.†

BUT Milton next, with high and haughty stalks,  
Unfetter'd, in majestic numbers, walks :  
No vulgar hero can his Muse engage,  
Nor earth's wide scene confine his hallow'd rage.  
See ! see ! he upward springs, and, towering  
    high,  
Spurns the dull province of mortality ;  
Shakes Heaven's eternal throne with dire alarms,  
And sets the Almighty Thunderer in arms !  
Whate'er his pen describes I more than see ;  
Whilst every verse, array'd in majesty,  
Bold and sublime, my whole attention draws,  
And seems above the critic's nicer laws.

\* Epigram on Milton.

† From an Account of the Greatest English Poets.

How are you struck with terror and delight,  
When angel with archangel copes in fight !  
When great Messiah's outspread banner shines,  
How does the chariot rattle in his lines !  
What sound of brazen wheels, with thunder, scare  
And stun the reader with the din of war !  
With fear my spirits and my blood retire,  
To see the seraphs sunk in clouds of fire :  
But when, with eager steps, from hence I rise,  
And view the first gay scene of Paradise ;  
What tongue, what words of rapture, can express  
A vision so profuse of pleasantness !

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## THOMSON.\*

—————For lofty sense,  
Creative fancy, and inspection keen  
Through the deep windings of the human heart,  
Is not wild Shakspeare thine and Nature's boast ?  
Is not each great, each amiable Muse  
Of classic ages in thy MILTON met ?  
A genius universal as his theme ;  
Astonishing as Chaos ; as the bloom  
Of blowing Eden fair ; as Heaven sublime !

\* The Seasons—' Summer.'

## GRAY.\*

NOR second HE that rode sublime  
Upon the seraph-wings of ecstasy ;  
The secrets of the abyss to spy,  
He pass'd the flaming bounds of place and time :  
The living throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where Angels tremble while they gaze,  
He saw ; but, blasted with excess of light,  
Closed his eyes in endless night.

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## COLLINS.†

HIGH on some cliff, to Heaven up-piled,  
Of rude access, of prospect wild,  
Where, tangled round the jealous steep,  
Strange shades o'erbrow the valleys deep,  
And holy Genii guard the rock,  
Its glooms embrown, its springs unlock ;  
While on its rich ambitious head  
An Eden, like HIS own, lies spread ;  
I view that oak the fancied glades among,  
By which, as MILTON lay, his evening ear,  
From many a cloud that dropp'd ethereal dew,  
Nigh spher'd in Heaven, its native strains could  
hear,  
On which that ancient trump he reach'd was  
hung ;

\* Progress of Poesy.

† Ode on the Poetical Character.

Thither oft his glory greeting,  
From Waller's myrtle shades retreating,  
With many a vow from Hope's aspiring tongue,  
My trembling feet his guiding steps pursue;  
In vain :—Such bliss to one alone  
Of all the sons of Soul was known;  
And Heaven and Fancy, kindred Powers,  
Have now o'erturn'd the inspiring bowers,  
Or curtain'd close such scene from every future  
view.

---

## MASON.\*

RISE, hallow'd MILTON! rise and say,  
How, at thy gloomy close of day;  
How, when 'depress'd by age, beset with wrongs;  
When 'fallen on evil days and evil tongues :'  
When Darkness, brooding on thy sight,  
Exiled the sovereign lamp of light;  
Say, what could then one cheering hope diffuse?  
What friends were thine, save Memory and the  
Muse?

Hence the rich spoils, thy studious youth  
Caught from the stores of ancient Truth :  
Hence all thy busy eye could pleased explore,  
When Rapture led thee to the Latian shore;  
Each scene, that Tiber's bank supplied;  
Each grace, that play'd on Arno's side;

\* Ode to Memory.

The rapid gales, through Tuscan glades that fly ;  
The blue serene, that spreads Hesperia's sky ;  
    Were still thine own : thy ample mind  
    Each charm received, retain'd, combined.  
And thence 'the nightly Visitant,' that came  
To touch thy bosom with her sacred flame,  
    Recall'd the long-lost beams of grace ;  
    That whilom shot from Nature's face,  
When God, in Eden, o'er her youthful breast  
Spread with his own right hand Perfection's gorgeous vest.

---

DR. ROBERTS.\*

POET of other times ! to thee I bow  
With lowliest reverence. Oft thou takest my soul,  
And waft'st it by thy potent harmony  
To that empyreal mansion, where thine ear  
Caught the soft warblings of a seraph's harp,  
What time the nightly visitant unlock'd  
The gates of Heaven, and to thy mental sight  
Display'd celestial scenes. She from thy lyre  
With indignation tore the tinkling bells,  
And turn'd it to sublimest argument.

\* Epistle on the English Poets.



## COWPER.\*

AGES elapsed ere Homer's lamp appear'd,  
And ages ere the Mantuan swan was heard :  
To carry Nature lengths unknown before,  
To give a MILTON birth, ask'd ages more.  
Thus Genius rose and set at order'd times,  
And shot a day-spring into distant climes,  
Ennobling every region that he chose ;  
He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose ;  
And, tedious years of gothic darkness pass'd,  
Emerged all splendor in our isle at last.  
Thus lovely halcyons dive into the main,  
Then show far off their shining plumes again.

---

## COWPER.†

## PHILOSOPHY, baptized

In the pure fountain of eternal love,  
Has eyes indeed ; and, viewing all she sees  
As meant to indicate a God to man,  
Gives Him his praise, and forfeits not her own.  
Learning has borne such fruit in other days  
On all her branches : piety has found  
Friends in the friends of science, and true prayer  
Has flow'd from lips wet with Castalian dew.  
Such was thy wisdom, Newton, childlike sage !  
Sagacious reader of the works of God,  
And in his word sagacious. Such too thine,  
Milton, whose genius had angelic wings,  
And fed on manna.

\* Table Talk.

† The Task, Book III.

## WORDSWORTH.\*

MILTON ! thou shouldst be living at this hour ;  
England hath need of thee : she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;  
O, raise us up ! return to us again ;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart :  
Thou hadst a voice, whose sound was like the sea :  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free ;  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness : and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

---

## I.

HE, most sublime of bards, whose lay divine  
Sung of the Fall of Man, was in his style  
Naked and stern ; and to effeminate ears  
Perchance ev'n harsh ; but who will dare dispute  
His strength and grandeur ? What bright glories  
shine  
Upon the towers of his gigantic pile,  
Which neither storms nor Time's destruction fears,

\* Written in 1802.

Eternal growth of an eternal root !  
How plain the words, that with essential thought,  
Pure, heavenly, incorporeal,—by the skill  
Of angels' tongues how marvellously wrought,  
The web ethereal, where the serpent's ill  
Brought woe and ruin into Paradise,  
And drove the sire of man from Eden's bliss !

---

## II.

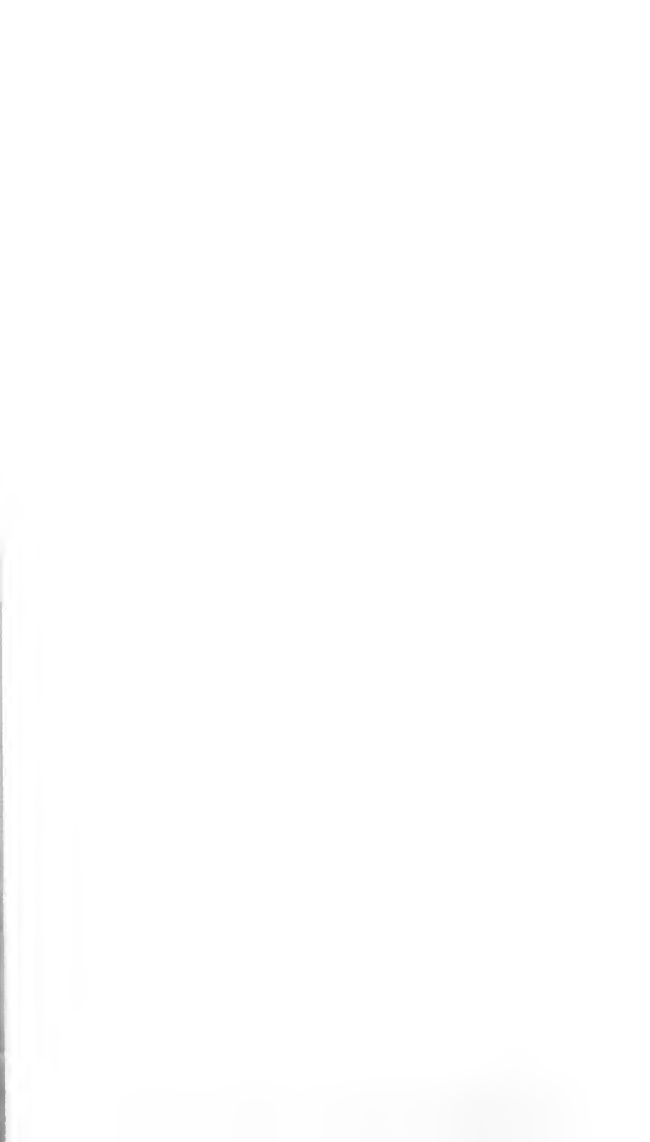
Not Milton's holy genius could secure  
In life his name from insult and from scorn,  
And taunts of indignation ; foul as fall  
Upon the vilest tribe of human kind !  
Nor yet untainted could his heart endure  
The calumnies his patience should have borne :  
For words revengeful started at his call,  
And blotted the effulgence of his mind.  
But, O, how frail the noblest soul of man !  
Not o'er aggressive blame the bard arose ;  
His monarch's deeds 'twas his with spleen to scan ;  
And on his reign the gates of mercy close !  
He had a hero's courage ; but, too stern,  
He could not soft submission's dictates learn !

E. B.

END.













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